



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

АН 446Р N



E. T. Gannett

From his friend

W. H. C.

Handwritten text, possibly a signature or name, appearing in three lines.

JESUS

AND

HIS BIOGRAPHERS;

OR THE

REMARKS ON THE FOUR GOSPELS

REVISED WITH COPIOUS ADDITIONS.

BY

William Henry
W. H. FURNESS.

"A great deal is said about the beauty of the Scriptures, without reference to any just principles of taste."

PHILADELPHIA:

CAREY, LEA AND BLANCHARD.

1838.

558.5
Furness
cop. 2

Entered, according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1838, by W. H. **FURNESS**, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

C. SHERMAN & Co. PRINTERS,
19 ST. JAMES ST.

P R E F A C E.

THIS volume varies from the "Remarks on the Four Gospels," by the omission of two chapters of that work, and the addition of eight. The subject of the Miracles is discussed anew, not that the former discussion is supposed to contain any material error, but because it appears less satisfactory and more liable to be misapprehended than that contained in the present work, and also, because, since the publication of the Remarks, I have been aided by the criticisms of some whom I greatly respect, in giving, as I think, a better exposition of my views. Other omissions, and additions to a considerable extent have been made, (it is unnecessary to specify them,) by which the present becomes a new work, rather than a new edition of the former one; and the adoption of another title is justified. It now makes some approach, very distant indeed, to a life of our Saviour, and might perhaps be entitled "Hints towards a Life of Jesus."

The additional matter contained in this volume might well, in regard to quantity, have been published separately. But such is its character, I was unwilling to let it go forth except in connexion with the former work, lest it should be thought that I aim to pull down, when I am striving to build up; to explain away, when I would reveal and establish the truth; a misconception so erroneous and unjust that I would take all pains to guard against it,

and one to which it is my hope that the reader, however he may dissent from me in particular instances, will not now be liable.

Still to the purchasers of the former volume an apology is due for superseding it, as the present work does; an apology, which it might not be easy to find, were pecuniary considerations the chief concern with them or with the writer. As it is, he seeks his justification for the manner in which he has published what he feels to be valuable truth, in the exceeding greatness of the theme, which must cause treatises, far more elaborate than any he has attempted, to be considered but as steps in the progress towards clearer and still clearer light.

For the views presented in these pages the author is alone responsible. The reader will look in vain for an exposition of the peculiar opinions of any denomination of Christians. The work makes pretensions to no such character. It is simply an attempt to state the convictions of an individual mind upon a subject of the greatest interest; to give expression to a deep sense of the vital truth of the divinest chapter in the history of the world; to bring home to other minds the reality of that momentous period, when a full revelation was made by the Father of lights, and this earth was honoured by the presence of a special messenger from Heaven.

To all who are seeking light—thirsting for a real, personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, the writer, with fraternal sympathy and respect, proffers the aid of this volume. Whether they assent to such of his statements as may be accounted peculiar, is not the chief concern. If the perusal of these pages tends to refresh and increase their sense of the truth of those matchless Records, to make them feel that there is far more contained therein than they have yet dreamed, his labour will

not be in vain. The honour commonly paid to the Scriptures is, to a very great extent, the hollow homage of prescription and conformity. We cannot but remark the absence of a cordial, intelligent sense of their worth. The common mode of commenting on them is technical, petty, childish. They are handled as if it were feared that they would break, were they submitted to a thorough examination; as if, though made of 'true Asbest,' they could not bear the searching fires of free inquiry. This thing ought not so to be. This treatment of the sacred volume, our anxiety on its account, is narrow, needless, and insulting. Vain is the fear of what man can do unto it. It owes not the slightest advantage to the forbearance of his boasted intellect, and holds all such protection as beneath disdain. Charged with the inspiration of immortal truth, it shall in due time receive due regards, and be treated with the generous respect and fearless confidence which must accompany the recognition of its true character. In the meanwhile, amidst much unbelief, and much indifference, cheering signs are visible. The moral reforms in which men are becoming interested, are incidentally disclosing the incompetency of the common methods of scriptural interpretation. For his own part, the present writer abides in the belief that the world is breathing a little more freely every day; and, if he may refer to his own limited experience, he knows not which has been most gratifying, the cordial assent which has been given by some to his modes of viewing certain scriptural subjects, or the candour with which he has been judged by others, who could not agree with him, and for which he takes this opportunity of making his thankful acknowledgments.

August, 1838.

CONTENTS.

PART I.

CHAP. I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE GOSPELS, HISTORIES	13
III. THE HONESTY OF THE GOSPELS	22
IV. THE SAME, CONTINUED	36
V. THE SAME, CONTINUED	53
VI. THE CONSISTENCY OF THE GOSPELS	70

PART II.

CHAP. I. THE NATIVITY	96
II. THE BAPTIST	137
III. THE BAPTISM	147
IV. THE TEMPTATION	166
V. THE COMING	184
VI. THE TEACHER	213
VII. THE MIRACLES, PART I.	236
VIII. THE MIRACLES, PART II.	269

CHAP IX. THE TRANSFIGURATION	315
X. THE PROPHET	332
XI. THE MAN	355
XII. THE CRUCIFIXION	387
XIII. THE RESURRECTION	406
XIV. CONCLUSION	431

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

"The first condition of success is, that in striving honestly ourselves, we honestly acknowledge the striving of our neighbour; that with a Will unwearied in seeking Truth, we have a Sense open for it, wheresoever and howsoever it may arise."—*Edinburgh Review*.

ALL denominations of Christians appeal to the Christian Records to determine what Christianity is. Here we are all united. But so numerous and discordant, so narrow and unworthy are our representations of the religion, which we insist to have come from Heaven, that serious doubts have arisen as to the possibility of knowing what the scriptures really do teach, and the worth of their meaning, even were it ascertained. In the confusion of opinions doubt has become denial; and whatever outward conformity may appear, it is not to be concealed that numbers of intelligent and not ill-disposed men are all but fixed in the conviction, that the Christian scriptures, like the creeds and dogmas which they have occasioned, are the offspring of ignorance, delusion or fraud, and that the study of them is labour thrown away.

And yet, amidst "the discordant voices of wrangling theologians," tones of a celestial melody have fallen on the ears of the most heedless, and through the clouds of doubt, raised by contending sects, traits of truth have beamed out from the New Testament, so bright and significant as to be recognised at the slightest glance

even by the most distrustful. The wisdom and benevolence of the precepts of Jesus Christ, the conspicuous excellence of his character, and the pacific spirit of his religion, are topics of commendation with friends and foes, so that, after all, there are very few indeed who are so ignorant or skeptical, as not to entertain a certain feeling of respect for Christianity and the Christian Scriptures.

But this feeling of respect is vague and barren. It is found to co-exist with an utter rejection, secret or openly avowed, of all the historical details of the sacred history. The worth of the precepts of Jesus may be conceded, and even insisted upon with considerable warmth, and yet nothing be admitted concerning the particulars of his life beyond the simple fact of his existence.

Observing this state of things, and conscious of the need of a distinct, satisfactory, personal faith, I have felt a simple and strong curiosity to know, first of all, what the Histories of the life of Christ are, what they really contain; to ascertain, if I may, their precise character and claims. What are the four Gospels? Are they mere collections of legends, compositions in which historical fictions are mixed up with a few choice grains of moral truth? Or, are they honest and authentic histories, relations of real events, of things that actually took place as they are represented, containing, it may be, some misstatements here and there, with regard to a few, subordinate particulars, but substantially true and accurate, and in the highest degree worthy of confidence and credit?

This fundamental question can never be fully settled but by a careful and critical examination of the Gospels themselves. We must study them fearlessly and thoroughly, if we would know what they contain, and

whether their contents be true. Accordingly, in all my endeavours to discover their real character, I have tried to forget the statements and interpretations of others, all those interpretations, at least, which are disputed. I have wished to put out of view all that is said and written about the authority and meaning of these remarkable writings, and to read them, as nearly as possible, with the freshness and freedom with which they would be read by one who should now open them for the first time. But it is not possible nor desirable, nor have I attempted, to throw off the influence of authority altogether. He must be deficient in sensibility for the truth, who takes up these books, desirous to know their contents, without a feeling of awe inspired by the thought of the respect in which they have been held for ages. The veneration, so long and widely felt for them, furnishes in their favour a presumption, to which it would vitiate all our investigations to refuse great weight. There must be some powerful element of truth in that which has taken so large and strong a hold upon the human mind. The Gospels must be approached therefore with a sentiment of respect, produced, not only by those obvious and acknowledged features of truth to which I have referred, but also by the fact that they are circulated and honoured throughout all Christendom, and through the vicissitudes of centuries, have maintained a high place in the esteem of the world. He who does not recognise the claim which they thus prefer to a serious and respectful consideration, lacks sympathy with the great brotherhood of his race; and must be destitute of that sensibility which is an indispensable qualification to the perception of moral and religious truth.

'This inquiry into the character and contents of the Christian records is of commanding and universal inter-

est. If men have spent their lives in the study of the changes of the globe, the aspects of the heavens, or the mysteries of an insect, a plant, or a stone, we may well deem it worth our time and toil to investigate these books. To say the very least, their existence is among the most curious phenomena of our condition. But besides, they are vitally connected with the history and interests of our nature, with its deepest wants, its highest happiness, its most sacred hopes. There are questions concerning his own being and prospects, which arise sooner or later in the heart of every man. They cannot be suppressed, and we know not how much the Christian scriptures may aid in their solution. No thoughtful mind will question the interest and importance of the present inquiry.

In attempting the study of the four Gospels, with the motives, and in the manner above-mentioned, I have arrived at some results, which, to my own mind, are satisfactory and most interesting. In addition to those general evidences of truth, manifest to all, I have discovered others, not so obvious, but far more definite and decisive. They have become so abundant, as I have proceeded, that I do not believe there is any work of nature or art, more copiously impressed with the signs of reality, than the accounts of the life of Christ are with the characteristics of true and faithful histories. If truth is apparent in the simplest case, then is it completely, irresistibly manifest here. Some of these characteristics it is my design to exhibit in the present work. They consist for the most part of those unintentional, unconscious coincidences, which belong only to truth, nature, reality, and which, when once fully apprehended, produce a conviction of truth that no candid and well-disposed mind can resist.

The general argument is in substance a familiar one,

and so are some of the illustrations presented in the following pages. But a considerable portion of the internal evidence here detailed is new ; I am not aware that it has ever before been adduced or observed. If so, then how truly undesigned must these signs of truth be, which have remained so long unnoticed ! Had they been intended by the authors of the Gospels to produce an appearance of truth, they would have been more conspicuously arrayed.

But many of the coincidences, which I am to trace in the course of this work, may be objected to as imaginary and fanciful. "Your observations are all very well, quite ingenious," (so my readers may be pleased to say,) "but these traits of truth, these curious correspondences that you note, are, perhaps, your own inventions, and not discoveries. You do not find, but make : how do we know but that your suggestions are the merest conjectures, having an existence in your own mind only, and without the least foundation in the Gospels themselves ?" In reply to this query, I do not pretend to say that I have not been led in some instances to mistake a mere fancy for a veritable token of truth. But if cases of this description occur in these pages, they may be pointed out and shown to be such. Is the fanciful not to be distinguished from the true ? But this is not all. While every department of inquiry, and religion especially, is to be vigilantly guarded against the intrusion of wild conjectures and random guesses ; in all investigations, scientific, philosophical, and historical, suggestions may be made, which, strictly speaking, perhaps, must be denominated conjectural ; and yet which, carefully weighed, are found to be so fully authorised, nay, so distinctly demanded by the acknowledged circumstances of the case, that we cannot deny them the force of the soundest logical deductions. Very

often, what was at first a mere supposition, is found to have been suggested, unconsciously it may be, by the strictest analogies, and to be involved in the case under examination, and justified by it as completely as if it were legibly inscribed thereon. All that is comprised in a given fact is not at once visible to any man, nor alike visible to all. Our powers of vision, bodily and mental, are infinitely various and susceptible of great cultivation. From some happy circumstance in his position, by an unusual effort of attention, by previous study, or by the blessing of Heaven in some unrecognised form, an individual may see what is unseen by others. He may be the victim of an illusion ; but we have no right to pronounce him so, solely because we cannot immediately perceive what is evident to him. If he is in an error, the error may be traced and accounted for ; at some one point or other, it will fail to harmonise with reality, for nothing is throughout consistent with truth but truth. I do not pretend to any remarkable powers of vision ; much lies invisible in the Gospels, only because we do not look for it according to our ability, our right, and our duty. Whenever in these pages I appear to assume as probable and real, things not fully stated in the record, I only ask that they may be fairly considered, and so, perhaps, what at first sight seemed a fancy may be a fact, made plainly to appear by sound and legitimate inferences. •

I do not undertake an enumeration of the characteristics whereby a history is shown to be true and authentic. It would be no easy task ; not because they are either slight, incidental, or ambiguous, but because they pertain to the very essence of truth, and to the profoundest principles of thought and expression. Very often the indications of truth are so delicate, that, although they may be instantly and fully felt, they cannot

readily be described, nor, without the finest powers of discrimination, referred to general principles. And, besides, it is not necessary to my purpose. It will suffice for the present, if I am able to point out as many of these internal signatures of truth in the case of the historical books of the New Testament, as will cause their substantial truth to be felt in something of its intrinsic vividness.

This, now, is my object in the following pages. Taking up the first four books of the New Testament as human compositions, forgetting as far as possible all that has been said of their authority and inspiration, cherishing only that respect for them which the most imperfect acquaintance with their contents, and the veneration with which they have been so long and widely regarded must inspire, and that candour which it becomes us always to cherish, I propose to point out those characteristics of these writings which have produced in my mind a new and lively conviction of their truth, —a new sense of their wonderful beauty and power. I do not presume to furnish anything like a complete analysis of their style and contents. I am deeply impressed with the idea that all which I can offer is gathered but from the borders of an immense field, in which untold treasures of moral truth and evidence lie buried. I wish only to state what I have seen with my own eyes, and felt with my own heart;—to give some of the results, such as they are, of my own humble reading and study. I hope I shall be able to create in minds better qualified to pursue the work, a belief in the exceeding riches of a region, as yet so imperfectly explored.

The train of remark upon which I propose to enter, admits of certain concessions which I wish to make distinctly in the outset.

1. I am willing to concede, that upon a first and cursory examination of these four histories, things of a strange and improbable nature present themselves. Extraordinary facts are stated, which we feel demand extraordinary proof; and the suspicion is not unnatural, that delusion may have had some share in the production of these writings. Admitting that these impressions may be made by some parts of the New Testament history, I nevertheless hope to point out features of truth, numerous and significant enough to create a lively sense of reality; and to induce an impartial mind to draw from every portion of these books, however obscure and difficult, such conclusions only as tend to sustain their substantial credibility.

2. In the exposition of that beautiful argument for the truth of the Scripture History of St. Paul, stated with so much felicity by Dr. Paley in his *Horæ Paulinæ*, he has this language: "The reader is at liberty to suppose these writings (the Epistles of Paul and the Book of Acts,) to have been lately discovered in the library of the Escorial, and to come to our hands, destitute of any extrinsic or collateral evidence whatever; and the argument I am about to offer is calculated to show, that a comparison of the different writings would, even under these circumstances, afford good reason to believe the persons and transactions to have been real, the letters authentic, and the narration in the main to be true." I am ready to make a similar concession—to suppose that the four Gospels, as they are called, have just been discovered under some ancient ruins—that the names even by which they are designated, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, have been obliterated—that they are anonymous. Even if the reader incline to the idea that the four Gospels are only different versions of one story—one original Gospel, it will

not materially affect the present argument. Still I trust it will appear that these books are the productions of truth and honesty—that the accounts they contain were drawn from persons present on the spot—in fine, that they are not legends, fictions, romances, but true histories of real persons and real events.

There is one thing, however, respecting these writings, which, it is obvious, I intend to assume,—their antiquity; not, however, because even this point may not be very satisfactorily made out from their internal structure. If they were now suddenly placed before us for the first time, from what quarter we knew not, there would be incontestable evidence that they were not the productions of any recent period. There is no work so general and abstract that it is not in innumerable particulars indelibly impressed by the age in which it appears. A biographical or historical work, abounding in notices of places, persons, manners, customs, and sentiments, in certain modes of thought and expression, furnishes on its very face, the means of fixing its date with some approach to correctness. This is the case with the writings which we are now to consider. They are antique in their whole costume. They could not have been written in this age, nor at any time very far removed from that at which they are generally believed to have been composed, because they bear none of the impressions of any such time. I do not insist that their date can be fixed with precision merely from internal marks, but that they show beyond all doubt that they were written very near the time to which they are usually referred. It is not the direct notices of time, found here and there in these writings, which constitute indubitable signs of antiquity, because such notices might easily have been forged and interwoven with these narrations, even had they been pro-

duced at a much later period. It is their numerous and familiar references to the customs and opinions of a certain age, their peculiar forms of expression and thought, connected with the absence of all allusions to modes of thinking and speaking prevalent in all subsequent ages, that help us so effectually to determine the period to which they should be assigned.

But it is unnecessary to undertake an enumeration of the evidences of antiquity abounding on every page of the New Testament, because there are hardly any so ignorant or so captious as to question the age of these writings. And if there are, there is one consideration at hand which seems to me decisive. You need not go back to the past to inquire about the existence of these books; consider a fact that presents itself before your eyes—the wide, and I may say superstitious veneration with which these books are now regarded. They lie at the bottom of the faith of many nations, and a complicated structure of forms and institutions rests upon their professed authority. How does their influence pervade the whole fabric of society—our public establishments, our systems of education, our modes of thought and language! The feelings of awe and sacredness which have gathered round these books cannot have been the growth of any brief period. The religious prejudices and associations of the human mind are not the offspring of a day, but the slow formation of centuries. The extensive circulation of the New Testament—the present fact that it is every where a familiar, household book, proves, I say, not its truth, but its age. The gospels must be hundreds of years old at all events.

But decisive as is the inference in favour of their antiquity from the position which they now occupy, it is not all. Their existence can be traced back some four-

teen hundred years, to go no further, by a chain of historical evidence as strong and uninterrupted as the most skeptical can demand. And the earliest notices we have of them are not as of books then first published, just appearing, but of works even then extensively received and copiously quoted. A great portion of the literature that existed ages ago, bears incidental evidence not only to the existence, but to the influence of these writings. So abundant are the quotations from them in the works of early Christian writers, that it has been said that if they had been lost in their present forms, they might have been restored from the writings of the Fathers. At the commencement of the fourth century, Christianity was the religion of the Roman Emperor. The Gospels must have had an existence antecedent to this event, the conversion of Constantine. Now, if we know that so long ago these books were extensively read, quoted, and venerated, the conclusion is inevitable that they were in existence years and years before. To have won their way into so wide a circulation—to have become possessed of so large a space and so weighty an authority, when no art of printing was known, and the means of intercourse and communication were so imperfect, must have been a work of time. So that the Christian records must have been old, even when we find the first notices of them in early writings.

Assuming the antiquity of these writings, without further remark, I proceed to the proposed examination of their style and contents, upon the principle, that from every written composition, we may infer, more or less confidently, the character and credibility of its author. Every narrative, by the manner in which it is put together, enables us to form some conception of the intelligence, the amount of information, the spirit and the

particular motives and prepossessions of the individual from whom it has proceeded. So that every history is unconsciously and unavoidably a history of its author. It is a virtual account of his mind and character, a representation of his moral and intellectual lineaments, of his qualifications for the work he has produced, of his claims to be believed,—in fine, of the source whence the history has emanated ; whether it be the offspring of Truth, of Imposture, or of Delusion. It is true the motives which a writer professes, the sentiments he expresses, may not be his real motives and sentiments. Still Affectation is one species of Falsehood, and, as such, though it may not be as readily, yet is it as truly distinguishable from Truth as any other form of error. To different writings these remarks apply with different degrees of force. A work may be so brief, so general and so obscure, as to afford us but a very dim idea of the spirit of the writer. I hope, however, to make it appear that the books now to be examined are, to a remarkable extent, precisely of the kind which furnish the most copious and satisfactory manifestations of the spirit and aim of their authors. Indeed, I venture to assert, that if we had authentic and minute biographies of the writers of the four Gospels, we should still have the most decisive illustrations of their characters in the style and structure of the Gospels themselves. We should still see in these their works, the strongest evidence that they were eye and ear-witnesses of the things they record—men of good sense and sound hearts, possessing excellent powers and opportunities of observation, and inspired, to an uncommon degree, by that singlemindedness upon which we always delight to repose our most cordial confidence.

CHAPTER II.

THE GOSPELS, HISTORIES.

"The Scripture is no one summary of doctrines regularly digested, in which a man could not mistake his way; it is a most venerable, but most multifarious collection of the records of the divine economy, a collection of an infinite variety of Cosmogony, Theology, History, Prophecy, Psalmody, Morality, Apologue, Allegory, Legislation, Ethics, carried though different books, by different authors, at different ages, for different ends and purposes.

"It is necessary to sort out what is intended for example, what only as narrative. * * * *"

BURKE—*Speech on the Acts of Uniformity.*

IN looking over the four Gospels, the first and most obvious feature that strikes us is their Historical character.

They have been so long and so widely treated as creeds or formulas of faith, made up of formal propositions, each by itself affirming an independent and unqualified article of belief, that we are apt to overlook altogether this remarkable trait, their historical nature. They are not argumentative, nor didactic. They belong to the department of History, Biography, Memoirs. They may be complete or imperfect, true or the grossest fabrications, still they are not philosophical treatises, elaborate statements of principles more or less important. They are evidently histories, narratives. They are crowded with incidents. They abound in notices, direct and indirect, of persons, places, and events. They scarcely contain what with any propriety can be called an abstract discourse. The circumstances mentioned, too, are for the most part remark-

able for their publicity, and even those portions that approach nearest to the character of sermons are not general in their style of thought, but are expressed in a popular phraseology, and are filled with local and personal allusions. The scene is not laid in a dark, retired corner, but the course of events is represented as going on over a vast extent of country, in the presence of particular individuals and large multitudes. Cities and villages with their respective localities are incidentally designated, wherein the facts narrated took place. To speak more dramatically, the curtain rises, and the first glance shows us Jerusalem and its magnificent temple, Judea, the River Jordan, the Sea of Galilee, and the region round about; and we stand in the open air, and under the noonday sun, to observe the progress of the events related. Multitudes are collected before us. Different individuals and whole classes of men pass over the stage, Pharisees and Sadducees, Teachers of the Jewish Law, Roman soldiers, Tax-gatherers, Centurions, and Magistrates, and all has the air of the greatest publicity.

Now what is the natural inference from this obvious feature of these writings? If a book of a similar character were published at the present day, a book not occupied with speculative discussions, not stating principles or opinions, but relating facts, purporting to have occurred in some well-known country and within the last fifty or sixty years, filled with circumstantial details, abounding in allusions, local, personal, civil, introducing the names of public functionaries and officers—of parties, religious and political, how would such a publication be regarded? It would either be understood at once and by all as a mere work of imagination, so considered by the author himself, and published as a fiction, not to be credited as true, but to exercise and

illustrate his own invention, and to procure for him the fame of genius ; or, should we suppose that he intended it to be believed, then it must be because of its substantial truth, or else he must be among the most absurd of men. Every man who has intelligence enough to fabricate a story with a view to impose upon the world, takes especial care how he meddles with facts, circumstances, names ; “ All things animate and inanimate are combined against falsehood.” In the great system of Nature and Providence, nothing exists alone and insulated. Every circumstance and every object, however trifling apparently, are inextricably related in innumerable ways to innumerable other circumstances and objects ; so that every fact virtually appeals to an incalculable mass of testimony. He who lays the scene of his story in a certain country, in the presence of multitudes, in the midst of public affairs and institutions, summons he knows not how many witnesses to testify to the truth of what he affirms. Every circumstance that he introduces swells the cloud of witnesses beyond all enumeration. If he relates what has no foundation in reality, he exposes himself to detection at unnumbered points, and it is impossible that he should not be instantaneously overwhelmed with the shame and ridicule which he so urgently invites. He is only spreading snares for his own feet, weaving a web in which he is sure to be caught and entangled.

It is fairly to be presumed therefore that the authors of the books under consideration never intended to state what was false. If they had designed to deceive—to relate what they knew was not true, they never would have been so prodigal of circumstances, so profuse in allusions to public persons, places, and events. Some caution—some apprehension of their liability to exposure would have shown itself in the manner in

which they touch upon details. But we find nothing of this kind. These writings are pervadingly narrative—full of incidents. There is no trace of caution or constraint. Whether true or false then, we cannot but conclude that they were written in good faith—that their author or authors believed them to be true. And if so, the presumption is equally strong that they *are* true in the main. Because although the most honest of men are liable to be deluded, yet it is wholly without example and utterly incredible that such a multitude of particulars, as are recorded in these books, should be mere delusions. They may be more or less misapprehended, but they must be substantially founded in fact. Such seems to be the obvious and natural inference from the simple abundance of facts in these books, from their character so eminently circumstantial.

Or, if the force of these remarks be not felt, then one thing is very clear, that writers so unwise, so imprudent—so reckless as to go blindly on, accumulating facts, adding incident to incident, and these too of the most public character, utterly insensible to the certainty of detection, at every step made doubly sure, must evince the same want of judgment and common sense in the structure of these narratives; and we may entertain the most confident expectation that a closer scrutiny will make the falsehood of their stories perfectly plain. If they were so foolish as thus shamelessly to fabricate such an abundance of facts, facts too of a public character, we may be sure of discovering the groundlessness of their pretensions. For although events appear to take place very much at random, and to be strung together with very little order and connexion, and individuals to speak and act from accidental and inconsistent impulses, yet every real series of circumstances of any length or number, especially if they involve the

sayings and conduct of any number of individuals, or even of only one individual, have a certain consistency belonging only to Nature and Truth. In fact, in the wildest appearances of the natural world,—in the clouds when they are piled in the most irregular masses in the atmosphere, there is ever a pervading and essential harmony of light, and shade, and form, which the common observer feels, though unconsciously, and without the perception of which the efforts of the artist are utterly fruitless. In the scenes and phenomena of the moral and intelligent world, a like coherence exists as a vital and all connecting element. It may not be easy, as I have already intimated, to show in what this keeping consists. But it is recognised and felt instantly by every intelligent and ingenuous mind. We perceive the absence of it continually in the ablest and most ingenious of the myriads of fictitious histories—of novels and romances, with which the press teems. In certain passages they always betray, even to unpractised eyes, the hand of human art, and the want of that air of truth, which though indefinable, is nevertheless real and most affecting. Nature and truth have their own marks which they impress upon every work of theirs, marks which to some extent human art may counterfeit, but which after all transcend the reach of fiction as much as the great Intelligence, that upholds all objects and controls all events, exceeds the mind of man. So, then, if the four gospels are mere fictions, and the series of events related have no foundation in reality, but only in imagination, to the extent to which this is the case, they must be deficient in that naturalness which is the accompaniment of truth only. It is impossible that mere fabrications should be undistinguishable from facts founded in truth and nature. Especially must the difference be apparent in the case of the

Christian records if they are fictitious, because they abound in facts, and are evidently put together without any apprehension on the part of their authors of their liability to detection. They who are so simple as to lay the scene of their fictions amidst public transactions, places, and persons, with so little perception of the risk of exposure, must betray the same want of good sense in the composition of their stories, and we may be perfectly certain that it will require no extraordinary degree of penetration to lay bare the delusion.

It is departing somewhat from the course which I have prescribed to myself, still I may be permitted to remark in this connexion, that the simple fact that these writings have obtained extensive credit, creates a very strong presumption of their substantial truth. That a thing is not proved because it has been long and generally believed, is a consideration of great importance which should never be lost sight of. Still the force with which it applies in any given instance, is determined by the nature of the subject proposed to us for our assent. If it be a mere matter of speculation—of opinion—a point upon which there is a peculiar liability to error, prejudice and delusion, authority can have but little weight. Yet, even in this case we can hardly help believing that whatever a large mass of men have for ages credited, must have in it some portion—some basis of truth. The extensive and enduring prevalence of a certain conviction or faith, is a fact, an effect, for which some cause must exist, and there is no cause so universal as truth. Thus it is commonly said and admitted that the universality of a belief in a God and in a life to come, is one argument for these two great doctrines, a presumption, at least, of their truth. But this presumption is a great deal stronger when the proposition demanding credit states a fact, or a number

of facts, and these, too, not insulated, not of a private but of a public nature ; because facts of this description must naturally and necessarily be associated and interwoven with myriads of other facts of universal notoriety. And the evidences of their truth or falsehood must be spread out in the greatest abundance in the eye of the world. If there were now just published a narration of facts of a character public and remarkable, like those recorded in the New Testament, and purporting to have taken place quite recently, within a few years, in this, or in some neighbouring community, if there were no truth in them, they could not gain credit for a single moment, for their falsehood would manifest itself at once to every man, so that he who runs might read, in the entire absence of all that near and collateral evidence, which every real event carries with it in the multiplicity of its public bearings and connexions, and which does not require to be searched after, as it is impossible to be overlooked.* The times, places, customs, institutions, feelings and opinions alluded to, more or less distinctly, presenting none of the traces or impressions which the facts reported must have left, would by their silence immediately reveal the fraud. On the other hand, if it were pretended that the incidents now first published, had occurred a great while ago, the simple fact, that in the present state of things no signs were visible of the impression which they must have originally made, would be decisive with every man, and they never could command general credit. Therefore, I say, the contents of the four Gospels being such as they are, events public and extraordinary, it is difficult to conceive how these books could ever have come to be extensively believed, if, when they were first published, whether soon or late after the things related took place, they had not been accompanied and corroborated by

that strong, indispensable, though unestimated and unrecorded testimony which every public event brings with it through its connexions and relations with other matters of undisputed notoriety. I am not maintaining as a general remark that a thing is proved to be true because it is believed. This only do I say, that it is hardly possible to imagine how the four Gospels could ever have obtained credit if they were not substantially true, because they are not accounts of abstract opinions, they are narrations, not of private visions and secret experiences, but of public occurrences, closely affiliated with the public affairs, persons and institutions of a certain period and a certain community. Their character being thus eminently circumstantial, the fact that they have been credited, is no faint presumption that they are true—that when they were first published, they brought with them that collateral corroboration which is exceedingly powerful, although it is seldom or never defined and estimated.

However, this is a digression from our proposed course of remark. My present design is, without reference to the authority or faith of others, to exhibit as far as is possible the truth of the Christian records, that quality in them which appeals to a deeper faculty than the understanding, from internal indications alone. With this view, we have now cast one hasty glance over these books, and the first thing that has arrested our notice, and furnished food for thought, is the *obviously historical and public nature of their contents*. From this trait we have inferred that they are either substantially true, or the most reckless fabrications ever published to the world. If the latter, then, there is an entire want of art in their composition. No one actuated by a design to deceive, would have strung together so many details, since he would be thereby virtually

collecting an untold weight of testimony to disprove the truth of his relations. I have not entertained the supposition that the authors of these books may have been self-deluded. In some particulars they may have been deceived. Whether they were or were not, remains to be seen upon a closer examination of these writings. We have looked now only at the circumstantial and public nature of the things they contain. So far as this is their character, they are inconsistent with delusion. Looking at the facts as they are given, having occurred as it is professed in the open air, at noon-day, in public places and amidst crowds, we hold that these accounts must be true in the main, or else such a want of art is evinced in their fabrication, as will show itself in their whole structure, and render it no difficult thing to settle fully their real character and claims.

CHAPTER III.

THE HONESTY OF THE GOSPELS.

"So stands it, in short, with all forms of intellect, whether as directed to the finding of truth or to the fit imparting thereof; always the characteristic of right performance is a certain spontaneity, an unconsciousness."—*Edinburgh Review*.

I COME now to the consideration of another and more decisive characteristic of these writings. It is the same trait upon which we have already remarked, but more strikingly manifested, showing itself in other ways; it may be designated as Unconsciousness or Simplicity. This feature reveals itself by luminous tokens. It appears in the most impressive manner that the authors of these books were wholly unconscious of any design to make out a case—to do anything but state facts.

In the eleventh chapter of the fourth book, entitled the Gospel according to John, we have a minute account of a most extraordinary event, the raising of a dead man, Lazarus, to life. It is represented as having taken place in a public manner. The stone which covered the mouth of the tomb is removed. Jesus calls aloud to the dead man to come forth. And he comes forth in the presence of a number of persons.

Now what does the narrative immediately proceed to inform us of? Why, that although some of the spectators were impressed and led to admit the extraordinary authority of Jesus, others did not believe, were not impressed, but went away and told the enemies of Jesus what had taken place! We are told with great

particularity how a most astonishing event took place, and in the same breath we are informed that some of those who stood by and saw it were unconvinced. And this information is communicated without the slightest appearance of reluctance or hesitation. Not an attempt is made—not a word is introduced to explain why the miracle failed to produce upon some who witnessed it, what we should consider its inevitable effect. It cannot even be said with propriety that they *confess* there were some present who did not believe. The information is not wrung from them. They give it freely, without the least consciousness of the ground it might seem to furnish for doubting the reality of the event. Here, I say, is a manifestation of the unconscious fearlessness of a true and honest mind, which beams out upon me like light from heaven. I see here that the writer thought of nothing but telling the truth, and telling it too, as a matter of course, without the least parade of frankness. The facts he states may be hard to be believed, and difficult to be reconciled with one another; still he cannot help that, and he does not even think of helping it; he gives them without hesitation, without comment, without any anxiety about the effect of the narration. Here is it that the true inspiration of these writings begins to be discernible, the inspiration of a single mind, unconscious of itself, stating the truth in the freest, simplest, most natural manner possible.

Again. In the twenty-eighth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, we have an account of the resurrection of Christ himself—of his appearing alive to his friends after he had been crucified and buried. “Then,” so we read in the 16th and 17th verses, “the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain, where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some *doubted*,”—doubted

whether it were indeed he. The most important event in the whole history, so we are explicitly informed, was doubted by some of those who had the best opportunity of ascertaining its truth! What is this but another instance of that perfect fearlessness, that indifference to effect, which truth alone can have.*

Once more. In the twelfth chapter of John, we read that when Jesus had uttered the words, “‘Father, glorify thy name,’ there came a voice from heaven, saying, I have glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people, therefore, that stood by and heard it, said that it thundered; others said, an angel spake to him.” What can be more manifest, than that the writer had no thought here but of stating facts. He relates a most extraordinary occurrence—the utterance of a voice from heaven, and, at the same time, without a word of explanation, tells us that the people who stood by and heard it, said that it was thunder.† It is these passages and others like them, that satisfy me that the narrators were honest—that they aimed only at relating things just as they took place. I see no shaping or accommodation of the events related to a particular design. There is a quiet, unobtrusive confidence in their mode of narration, which seems to me identical with a perfect conviction of truth—with a true spirit. I have given only a few instances; enough, however, to define and render prominent the characteristic of these writings upon which I am now remarking. Throughout, the same peculiarity is apparent.

* The conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel exhibit signs of being hurried. We may suppose that on the above-mentioned occasion there were many others present besides the eleven. It is said elsewhere, that Jesus was once seen, after his resurrection, by five hundred of the brethren. In so large a crowd there must have been some who were unable to approach him near enough to be sure that it was he.

† For further remarks on this passage, see Chapter X. Pt. II.

It is very often objected to the truth of the New Testament history, that if the wonderful things therein recorded actually took place, how is it possible that they should not have convinced the great body of the people. 'They must have been irresistible,' it is said, 'and we cannot conceive that they really could have occurred, or they would have produced a greater impression. We find that they were not believed—that the multitudes in whose presence Jesus is said to have done these astonishing works, clamoured for his blood, and joined in putting him to death.'

From a careful examination of the history, we may find reasons, although they are not ostentatiously thrust forward, to suspect that the unbelief of the Jews was not so great nor so general as this objection supposes. In one passage we are expressly told that many of the chief men believed in Jesus, although their fear of their equals did not allow them to confess it.* We are informed also that his enemies once and again dared not lay hands on him, because he was so generally favoured by the people. And then the seizure of his person, which took place in the night, and the disgraceful hurry of the Jewish court, by which he was pronounced guilty of blasphemy, create the idea that he fell a victim to faction. The priests knew well enough that if they could only present him before the people in the condition of a prisoner and a criminal, the association of such circumstances with his pretensions as the Messiah would shock the public mind and exasperate a mob against him. Shortly after his final disappearance we read of the conversion of three thousand persons to the Christian faith.† This is usually represented as sudden and miraculous. But surely it is more natural to suppose that this large body of converts was composed

* John xii. 42.

† Acts ii. 41.

mainly of those who had listened to the words and witnessed the works of Jesus. The tide of popular feeling was setting strongly in his favour, and the priesthood saw that his success must be their destruction; and I cannot but think that he was put to death by means of a sudden revulsion of feeling which the priests succeeded in producing.

But allowing the unbelief of the Jews to have been as inveterate and universal as is commonly represented, it may be perfectly accounted for, I apprehend, upon the known principles and constitution of human nature. Experience and observation bear witness that when men are swayed by any inveterate bias or passion, they are impregnable to the strongest evidence contradictory of their idolised notions. Every day we see men unaffected by facts and considerations, whose force miracles could not increase. The slave of intemperance, for instance, sees his wife and children perishing before his eyes. Shame and ruin and death stare him in the face, and still he persists in his darling indulgence, and keeps on in the downward path of destruction. The love of power intoxicates in a similar way. The Jews were burning with the thirst of national glory—of earthly prosperity and success. They had long considered themselves a sacred people—the peculiar favourites of heaven; and they were stung to madness at the thought of the foreign domination under which they had been brought—of the insolence of the Gentiles—"the sinners—the dogs," as they were wont to call them, who had enslaved them. They longed for triumph and revenge. They had set their hearts, like spoiled children, upon the appearance of a temporal prince and warrior to lead them on to victory and boundless renown. While absorbed by these passions, they could not bear to listen to one who, like Jesus,

breathed peace and love and forgiveness. They could not endure to have those hopes disappointed which they had so long cherished, and which, as they believed, their religion encouraged and sanctified.

In fact the unbelief of the Jews not only admits of the explanation at which I have briefly hinted, but, duly considered, it becomes an indirect and inverted evidence of the power manifested by Jesus. It could not have been any ordinary thing that wound them up to such a degree of exasperation. There must have been no little weight in the words and works of Jesus, or they would never have raged against him with so much violence.

But it is not my object now to give a full account of the unbelief of those in whose presence the wonderful works related in the Gospels were wrought. There is one thing upon which I wish to fasten the attention of the reader. Where is it that we learn that the Jewish people were unaffected by what was said and done by the man of Nazareth? Who is it that has told us that he was doubted and gainsaid by the mass of those among whom he lived and taught? It is the authors of the Gospels themselves—it is they, who without the slightest equivocation have recorded the fact that the majority of the people, including the teachers of the Law, the leading men of the time and community, nay, even the members of his own family, gave no credence to the pretensions of Jesus. This fact they have recorded so unreservedly that they cease to appear as his friends and adherents. They rather seem like impartial and uninterested spectators, having no feeling for the one side or the other; no feeling, at least, that for a moment disturbs their determination to tell the truth. I say their determination. And yet this does not seem to be the proper word. For there is no appearance of effort, of constraint or labour, as if conscious

of a temptation to unfairness they had to guard themselves accordingly. They write straight on as naturally as they breathe, stating with equal explicitness or with equal brevity, the words and works of Jesus, and the objections and incredulity of those around him, making no explanations, betraying no anxiety to influence the mind of the reader. In fine, their candour is for nothing more remarkable than for its unconsciousness. They do not seem to know that they are candid, or that they are actuated by a spirit in any degree remarkable and praiseworthy. Their honesty has no appearance of being put on. It is rather a part of their nature, the breath of their nostrils. If after all there is any mind so diseased with doubt as to fear that this character may have been assumed, I observe that it not only strikes me as utterly impossible, but if it were possible, then, for such deep laid and incredible cunning, there must have been the inducement of some most selfish and corrupt design, for the existence of which not a shadow of proof appears. But it is abundantly enough to say that if this is not candour,—honesty, there is no telling what honesty is ; there can be no indubitable tokens of its presence, and we can have no ground for faith or confidence in man.

The honesty of these narratives reveals itself in another way.

It is evident that Jesus Christ is their principal subject. They are histories of his life. Their authors obviously considered him worthy of profound reverence and implicit credit. And yet their accounts have not the faintest shadows of the character or style of eulogies, panegyrics. How truly has it been said that "biographers, translators, editors, all, in short, who employ themselves in illustrating the lives or the works of others, are peculiarly exposed to the Boswellian disease

of admiration." Whether the individual described be a creature of the imagination, or a real personage, he becomes the hero of the writer, and the utmost pains are taken to set him off in the most glowing colours—to magnify his least excellence—to be silent about every trace of imperfection in him—to guard every thing he says or does against misconstruction, or the slightest impression of an unfavourable nature. Nothing of this sort appears in the Christian Records. No attempt at embellishment can be detected. There are no expressions of admiration, no prompting, no challenging of the applause of the reader. All is calm, direct, and simple.

Indeed, in some cases it would appear that, so far from being conscious of any endeavour to heighten the effect of the things they relate, they not only do not do justice to the great subject of their biographies, but absolutely do not seem to have understood Jesus in all his elevation. There are passages from which one may incidentally, but on that account not the less fairly, infer that the conduct and meaning of Jesus were more beautiful than they have represented or even understood it. There is one curious case in point, which I proceed to consider. I do not affirm that the following view of it is necessarily the true view. I only say that it admits of the construction I put upon it.

In three of the Four Books we have accounts of obviously the same incident. I refer to the case of the woman who went behind Jesus in the crowd and touched his garments, and was instantly cured of a disease under which she had long suffered. In the Gospel of Matthew, this circumstance is related thus:

"And behold a woman who was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him and

touched the hem of his garment. For she said within herself, if I may but touch his garment I shall be made whole. But Jesus turned him about ; and when he saw her, he said, ' Daughter, be of good comfort ; thy faith hath made thee whole.' And she was made whole from that hour."

Mark's relation is this. " And a certain woman who had an issue of blood twelve years, and had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, when she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. For she said, ' If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.' And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up ; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague. And Jesus immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, ' Who touched my clothes?' And his disciples said, ' Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou who touched me?' And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what was done to her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. And he said unto her, ' Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole, go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.'"

According to Luke, " a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, who had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, came behind him and touched the border of his garment, and immediately her issue of blood stanchd. And Jesus said, ' Who touched me?' When all denied, Peter, and they that were with him, said, ' Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?' And Jesus said, ' Somebody hath touch-

ed me, for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me.' And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came, trembling, and, falling down before him, she declared before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was immediately healed. And he said unto her, ' Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole ; go in peace.' "

Now, although we perceive in these three accounts such variations as we commonly find and naturally expect in the different statements of honest and independent narrators, relating the same event, yet they all agree in one thing. They all tell us that when the woman came forward, Jesus addressed her in a cheering tone, assuring her that her faith had cured her. By this assurance, as I conceive, he intended to correct the impression she had evidently entertained, that there was a miraculous power of healing in his very garments. It was through the power of her own faith—the influence of her own mind, that so instantaneous a cure had been effected. It was not, as she had evidently surmised, through any medical virtue in his clothes, but through the energy of her own conviction, that she had been made whole. This seems to be the natural and obvious meaning of the few words he addressed to her.

But, and here is the point to which I wish to direct the attention of the reader, he does not appear to have been understood by at least two of the narrators. For Mark says that Jesus discovered that some one had touched him, by the departure of a healing virtue from his person. And Luke represents Jesus as declaring in so many words that he had felt a miraculous virtue go out of him. That he really made any such declaration, his assurance to the woman that her faith had made her whole, forbids me to believe. It is much

more natural to suppose that it was purely the inference of the historians that Jesus ascertained that some one had touched him, by the departure of a medical virtue from his body. They concluded that this was the way in which he found out that he had been touched: and one of them (Luke) has represented him as expressing himself to this effect. If these remarks are correct, then it follows that the narrators did not reach the true import of the words of Jesus, when he said to the woman, "Thy faith hath made thee whole." His representation of the case was more simple and spiritual than they supposed. I mean to say, in short, that they undertake to account for his knowing that some one had touched him, in a way which he evidently intended to disallow, when he bade the woman consider her own faith as the cause of her cure.

It is natural to suppose that the woman, agitated by the most powerful emotions, did not merely touch his garments, but seized them with a quick, convulsive grasp, and so he felt something peculiar and significant in the movement, and, surmising the truth, was induced to turn round and ask who it was.

If the account given above of this incident is admitted, how decisive, by the way, is the proof that the incident must actually have taken place.* The narrators could

* It is curious to remark, and it tends to corroborate the view here taken of the three passages that relate this incident,

1. That the comparative authority of the three narrators corresponds with the variations in their several accounts. According to the mode above proposed of regarding these passages, the simplest statement is Matthew's, and he was a personal disciple. The next in order of simplicity is Mark's, who was not a personal disciple, but the friend and relative of one, the Apostle Peter. The third, and least simple is Luke's, who was neither a personal disciple, nor the associate of a personal disciple, but the friend of the Apostle Paul. This coincidence may be merely accidental, still it is worth noting.

2. Adopting this account, we have in these three passages a very natural illustration of the manner in which, without any ill design, facts come to be

not have recorded what they did not understand, if it were not real.

I beg the reader not to permit the miraculous character of this occurrence to prevent his surrendering his mind to a full and candid consideration of the case. Upon the miraculous nature of many of the things related in these books, I propose to remark at length in the sequel. In the meanwhile, the reader is at liberty to regard this incident as furnishing one of the cases, by no means rare, in which an immediate and extraordinary effect has been produced upon the physical frame, through the power of a strong mental impression.

Whether the view I have taken of this case be correct or not, or whether there are any other instances in which the historians have fallen short of understanding the words and conduct of Jesus, in their real greatness and simplicity—one thing is plain enough. They evince no disposition to magnify him. They do not show him off. They make no comments, suggest no explanations, calculated to place what he said and did in a striking light. In their simple and brief sketches they appear oftentimes to have omitted the mention of important

related in different forms. Matthew relates the incident just as it occurred. How natural it is that some of those who were present, should infer that Jesus knew that some one had touched him by feeling the healing virtue go out of him, and should state what appeared to them an inevitable inference as a fact! Thus arose the account as it stands in Mark. When the event had been related in this shape, it is equally natural that some of those who heard it told in this way, should receive the impression that Jesus had said that he felt the virtue go out of him. And so we have Luke's account.

Luke mentions at the commencement of his gospel, that numerous accounts of the life of Jesus, gospels, more or less brief, more or less correct, were then in circulation. And the structure of his work gives us strong reasons to believe that he availed himself of these publications. Having had the best means of information, by personal intercourse with the friends of Jesus, he selected such as he knew to be authentic.

circumstances illustrative of his words and works. They seem to have been so fully possessed with the reality of the things they relate, that the idea of their ever being disproved never crossed their minds. They show not the slightest misgiving, lest others may fail to see and understand what is as clear to them as the sun at noonday. They betray no apprehension that the truth will not speak for itself, or that it needs any pains on their part to make it manifest. Hence the artless and careless brevity of their narrations.

At one time, as they tell us, an individual said to Jesus, "Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." Jesus replied, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Again, another offered to join Jesus, but begged permission first to go and bury his father. To him the reply was, "Let the dead bury their dead." On these occasions Jesus is represented as using a roughness inconsistent with his usual mildness and consideration. We may suppose that the individual first mentioned was actuated by a mercenary feeling in offering to follow Jesus, that he hoped for some worldly advantage, and that Jesus, seeing or fearing that such was his motive, gave him timely warning not to expect any thing of a worldly nature from him. With regard to the other, who desired first to be permitted to go and bury his father, we may with great probability conjecture that he made his filial duty a mere pretence for temporizing. He was not perfectly sure that Jesus was the expected Messiah; and while he wished to wait awhile until the true character of Jesus should be more satisfactorily ascertained, he desired to secure the advantage of an early profession. His father, we may even suppose, was not yet dead, but only very aged and infirm, and the request was in effect,

"Let me first discharge my duty to my father, and then I will come and be your disciple." To him, therefore, the reply of Jesus was most appropriate, "Let the dead bury their dead," that is, let those, and they are numerous enough, who are dead—insensible to the claims of truth—to the import of what I say and do, perform the necessary offices for the dead. Such are the explanations of which these passages are susceptible. They certainly appear natural and probable. But observe, they are not hinted at by the narrators; they are only indirectly, undesignedly suggested by the general tenor of their stories. They take no pains to guard against misapprehension, or to place the conduct of Jesus in the best light. Here I behold the boundless confidence of truth.

There are even more striking instances of the entire absence of any disposition to exaggerate the things recorded in these books. Circumstances are related with the utmost brevity, and without any indication of fear, which seem to be palpably inconsistent with the greatness and power ascribed to Jesus. We are told, for example, with an all-unconscious frankness, of the powerful appeals made to him by his enemies after he was fastened to the cross. They shook their heads at him, and cried, "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. He saved others, himself he cannot save. If he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him, for he said I am the son of God." Who has ever paused over these words for the first time, without feeling that they contained a bitter force—without secretly saying to himself, 'O why did he not come down! If he had power to heal the sick and raise the dead, why did he not descend then from the cross and

dissipate all doubt for ever!" Upon reflection, it is true, we recollect that he is never said to have used his extraordinary gifts for his own sake. It was not physical power that he sought to exercise, but moral power; the power of a love which no insensibility on the part of its objects could exhaust—of self-forgetfulness—of fortitude—of meek and patient endurance. He sought to show how one might do and endure, not from necessity, but voluntarily, to disclose the before unrevealed energy of a generous and self-denying free will. And had he relieved himself, had he shrunk from suffering pain and contempt, he must have forgotten his great spiritual purpose.

But, although this explanation is at hand, the narrators, be it remembered, do not suggest it. They record the sneers of his enemies, in all their naked force, unrelieved by a single word of comment. But I must pause here for the present.

Many a one, I imagine, when disturbed with doubts about the truth of the New Testament history, has secretly wished that he had been permitted to live in those days—to be present on the spot, and then how easily might he have satisfied himself. For my own part, I confess, I shrink at the thought of such a trial. A trial it must have been, as every one will perceive, who is aware of his own weakness, and knows the tremendous power of the example of a multitude. I fear I should have wanted courage and candour to resist the accumulated authority of the rich, and great, and learned, of the mass of the people, and have fallen in with the general insensibility, or participated in those prepossessions which presented so effectual a barrier against the force of the words and works of Jesus. One thing does seem to me most desirable. Could I

only have an account of those events from persons, or from only one person, whom I know, in whose good sense, integrity, and fairness, I have perfect confidence, then I should have a ground for my faith, than which none could be surer. Could individuals of this character have been present, and could we have their testimony, nothing would be wanting. I open the Four Gospels, and I feel that this want has been supplied most amply. When I read these books in the way in which I am now attempting to do it, I care not what names they bear, I see—I *know*—that they are the work of an honest and impartial spirit. Nowhere in the writings of the dead, or in the conduct of the living, do I discern evidences of integrity and singleness of mind so luminous and affecting. I see none of the art of a fraudulent design—none of the incoherence of self-delusion. These histories command my cordial confidence. They are to me full of inspiration, not a vague mystical inspiration, but the inspiration of truth and honesty, the same spirit that breathes in every honest man, in every true word, the Holy Spirit. God give us this spirit without measure!

CHAPTER IV.

THE SAME, CONTINUED.

“—— I only speak right on.”

WE have remarked upon the honesty of the Christian historians, particularly as it is evinced in the manner in which they speak of the principal personage of their narratives, the great object of their reverence and faith. They make no attempt to show him off. They manifest no apprehension about the impression that may be made by what they record. I am struck with the exhibition of their free, unguarded honesty, in the case which I am now about to mention.

We are given to understand with the utmost explicitness in these books, that Jesus was possessed of the most extraordinary powers—that he could heal the sick, give sight to the blind, and raise the dead, by a word. Numerous instances are detailed with remarkable particularity, in which, in the most public and satisfactory manner, he exercised these miraculous gifts. But on more than one occasion we are told that some of the principal men of the community came to him, and requested him to perform a miracle—to give them a sign, thus affording him an opportunity, as it would seem, of convincing them of his authority as a messenger from Heaven. “How long,” said they, with apparently great plausibility, “how long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.” On these occasions, as the historians have not hesitated to inform us, he directly and uniformly refused to com-

ply with the request made to him. They give us no explanation of the reasons of his refusal. They leave him open to the charge of having evaded an appeal apparently very fair.

It is not my immediate purpose to state the grounds of the conduct of Jesus in these cases. Still, as it admits of an explanation at once sound and rational, not only in accordance with but illustrative of the dignity of his character and the spirituality of his object, I may be permitted to hint at it in passing. The Jewish nation, as I have already had occasion to state, cherished the fond expectation of the appearance of a military leader and king, who should deliver them from Roman bondage, and place them where, as the peculiar people of God, they fancied they belonged, at the head of the human race. The existence of this expectation is proved incidentally, and therefore the more satisfactorily, by the Christian records. So we need not resort to other witnesses to establish this point, although they are not wanting. How tenaciously this hope clung to the minds of the Jews may be gathered from the conduct and feelings of the adherents of Jesus. They evidently expected him to establish a worldly kingdom, and to distribute among them its chief offices and honours, and out of this expectation there frequently rose among them jealousy and strife. After all that he had said and done to the contrary, they still cherished this hope to the very last. And just before his final disappearance their language is, "Lord, wilt thou now restore the kingdom to Israel?" As confidently as the Jews looked for a Messiah, they looked for him to be a temporal Prince and Deliverer.

Seeing then that this expectation existed so widely and deeply, is it not natural to infer that those who demanded of Jesus "a sign from heaven," failed of being

convinced by what he did actually say and do, because, although it proved him to be no ordinary man, still it did not carry out and realize their darling idea of the Christ? They wanted him to assume a character and to perform miracles, conformable to their cherished and pre-established notions. So that although at first sight it may appear that when they asked of him "a sign," they meant merely a display of miraculous power, no matter of what description, we may suppose that they intended a sign of a particular sort, a sign which should correspond to and justify their prepossessions. Indeed, it may be gathered from the Jewish writings, that an idea was entertained that the Messiah, when he came, would give some peculiar token or signal—some extraordinary display of power—a luminous appearance in the heavens perhaps, for it is not distinctly defined, which should be a credential of his authority, to point him out to the people as the Messiah, beyond the possibility of mistake. The Apostle Paul, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, observes, that the Jews seek after "a sign." And the inference is thus confirmed, that the sign sought was of a peculiar character, a sort of signal corresponding to the universal idea of the expected Deliverer. The demand for a sign, therefore, was equivalent to a demand for evidence that he was such a personage as was expected. But Jesus did not present himself to the nation as a military Leader. The office he assumed was infinitely superior to that of the most brilliant conqueror. Evidence therefore was demanded, of which the very nature of the case did not admit, and which he could not give. The grandeur and dignity of his aim prevented it. It was not he that made the Pharisees to doubt. Their doubts resulted from their own false prepossessions. These it was that led them astray or stopped them short of conviction.

He could not speak more plainly than he had already done by word and work. And if these failed to satisfy them, it was in vain that further evidence was asked for. He had nothing else to offer—nothing different in kind, nothing that those who were as yet unconvinced could appreciate, if they were not impressed by what he had already done. There were other things about to take place fitted to vindicate his authority. Events were approaching, as he intimated,—his death and resurrection,—which in their significance and consequences would, like signs from heaven, attest that he was sent by God.

But although the refusal of Jesus to comply with the demand of those who sought from him a sign admits of so ample a justification, yet it is not obvious; neither is it urged by the historians. And here again is the characteristic to which I wish to direct particular attention. They have not shrunk from recording, with simple and fearless brevity, the fact that, on different occasions, when Jesus was asked to exercise his miraculous gifts, he refused to accede to the request. They show no apprehension that the motive of his refusal may be misunderstood, or that he would come under the imputation of shrinking from a fair test of his power. They interpose no explanation to guard him against misconstruction. I can account for this characteristic of their narrations only by supposing, either that the explanation was so obvious to them that they never thought it could be necessary to give it, or else, that their confidence in Jesus was so perfect and entire, an unconscious feeling of their bosoms, that they never once dreamed that he could be suspected of an unworthy motive, however inexplicable his language or his conduct on certain occasions might appear. Whether his words and works were understood or not, they

do not appear to be aware that an injurious construction could by any possibility be put upon them. I know not what others may think, but it seems to me there is something so genuine, healthy, and natural, both in this state of mind, and in the way in which it manifests itself, that I cannot but refer it to truth and reality.

There is a consistency so remarkable and evidently so wholly undesigned, on the part of the narrators, in the passages in which mention is made of "a sign from heaven," that I cannot help taking notice of it in this connexion, although it does not properly come under our present head.

On one occasion we read, that just after Jesus had cured a demoniac in the presence of a multitude, some of the Pharisees asked him for a sign. He replied that he could give them no sign but his death and resurrection. At another time, immediately after he had driven the money-changers from the temple, he was asked to give a sign—to produce his credentials for the authority he had assumed. In this instance, also, his reply is an obscure allusion to his death and resurrection. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it up." Once more, just after he had fed a large multitude in a miraculous manner, the people followed him demanding a sign, intimating that he had not done as much as Moses, who had given their ancestors bread from heaven, alluding to the manna gathered by the Israelites in the wilderness. To this request Jesus answers at length, and obscurely, but the main points of his reply are his death and resurrection.

Now, we cannot fail to observe that the authors of these histories appear to be wholly unconscious of any remarkable keeping in these passages, and yet it is most curious. The circumstances upon these three occasions are entirely different, and so is the language

of Jesus. But the ideas expressed, the feelings evinced, are in perfect harmony. On each occasion, the demand for a sign was made just after Jesus had performed a remarkable work. So that it would seem as if those present had really been in some degree impressed with his extraordinary power, and only wanted to be satisfied that he was such a person as they were looking for, to give into his claims at once. His reply is invariably the same in substance, though differing entirely in form. He will give, he declares, no stronger evidence of the divinity of his mission, than would be expressed in events shortly to occur, his death and resurrection. These, he intimates, would furnish the most imposing proofs of his authority.

I confess I want words to express the sense of reality produced by these passages, so different in detail, so singularly consistent in substance. Of the consistency here, the writers do not appear to be at all conscious. They have taken no pains to make it apparent. It is perfectly natural and easy, but it is not obvious. I do not know that it has ever before been remarked upon.

I alluded just now to the driving of the money-changers from the temple. It is related that "when Jesus found in the temple those that sold oxen, and sheep, and doves, and the changers of money sitting, he made a scourge of small cords, and drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew their tables, and said unto them that sold doves, 'Take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise.'" This incident certainly appears, at first sight, to be inconsistent with the usual gentleness of Jesus, and that abstinence from all violence which he so emphatically inculcated, and on all other occasions exemplified. The reader has probably seen a

picture representing him in the temple, with outstretched arm, wielding the scourge with great vigour ; I need not say how offensive it must have been.

Without the least violation of probabilities, we may suppose, that on this occasion Jesus went into the temple attended by a large concourse of people ; and that, upon the first intimation of his will, the traders and money-changers, overturning the tables in their precipitation, fled before one who had the populace with him, as Jesus then had. The "scourge of small cords," so far from being an instrument purposely fashioned for violence, we may conjecture, was nothing more than a piece of cord found on the spot, and originally used, for obvious purposes, by the dealers in oxen and sheep, and taken and folded up into a sort of whip by Jesus, not perhaps with reference to the men, but the cattle. It is not by any means necessary to suppose that he even struck these animals, or that he assumed any attitude inconsistent with what we feel must have been the habitual dignity of his deportment. Candour justifies us in putting such a construction upon this incident, involving, certainly, no improbability. But the narrators do not hint at it. They have not feared to relate this event in the briefest and most careless manner. They have not told us how the dealers in oxen and sheep and doves, and the money-changers came to be in the temple ; although upon reflection it is clear that they were there to supply the demand for sacrifices and offerings for the temple-service, and to accommodate those who, coming from distant places, were under the necessity of exchanging their foreign money for the currency of Jerusalem. The authors of the Gospels have not told us these things, obviously because it never occurred to them that they needed to be told. Now, their confidence in the reality of what they were re-

lating, and in the correctness of the conduct of Jesus, is precisely like their knowledge of these circumstances, so settled and familiar a feeling with them, resulting from such obvious realities, so perfectly natural, that it does not occur to them that others may be deficient in these respects, and may require explanations. In the familiarity of their own information, and in the unconscious fulness of their own faith, they forget the possible ignorance and incredulity of others. Who can fail to recognise here the simplicity and integrity of their minds?

Once more. It is obvious that the authors of these writings must have considered Jesus as possessed of extraordinary spiritual strength, great firmness or fortitude. If in the composition of their narratives they have had any earthly object but a distinct and honest statement of what they had seen, known, and believed, if they have fabricated, coloured, or even selected incidents for any particular purpose, we may suppose that it was for the sake of showing the superiority of Jesus to every human infirmity. The suspicion of such a purpose becomes exceedingly natural when we consider two things.

1. In the Epistles Jesus Christ is spoken of in the most exalted terms. He is described as the image of God and the brightness of his glory. In him, it is said, dwelt the fulness of the Divinity. And again, in him it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell. But it is unnecessary to specify passages. The Apostles appear to exhaust language in expressing their sense of the excellence of their master.

2. But not only do the Apostles in their letters express in the strongest manner possible, and by the loftiest figures of speech, their sense of the greatness of their master,—at an early period, the idea sprung up,

and it has almost universally prevailed ever since, that the man of Nazareth was a super-human being—super-angelic,—nay, the Supreme Being himself, the very God. He has literally been deified for ages.

Believing Jesus Christ to have been a man, a man indeed of miraculous gifts, and of unequalled moral greatness, I see nothing either in the lofty language concerning him which we find in the Epistles, or in the prevalent faith of the Christian world, that does not admit of an easy and natural explanation. When I consider what power moral goodness has, even in its most imperfect manifestations, to touch and thrill the heart, and kindle the imagination, and inspire the utterance, I do not wonder that the Apostles used the boldest forms of speech to express the sense they had of the dignity and greatness of their Master. I do not content myself with referring to the strong and figurative character of the language of the East, although this is a circumstance not to be lost sight of. But I say it would have been strange indeed, had they employed cold and qualified terms when they spoke of Jesus. I honestly avow that I can find no epithets, no titles applied to him in their Epistles, which, with my views of his nature, I cannot cordially go along with. Had I been in their situation—had I cherished that fervent sense of his moral greatness, which they must have entertained, I am convinced I should have used language like theirs, and even stronger language, I might almost say, if that were possible. They apply no title to him, which, upon the supposition of his simple humanity, does not seem to me to have an appropriate significance.

And then too, as to the general belief of Christians in the supreme divinity of Christ, it does not surprise me. In all times the tendency to deify the great and good has shown itself. Man has always been disposed

to recognise the brightest manifestation of God in his own nature. What were the gods of the ancient Pagan world but deified men, individuals of extraordinary energy? This popular doctrine, therefore, respecting the nature of Christ, which has so long prevailed, is to my mind a most expressive tribute to the transcendent excellence of his character.

But the object of these brief allusions to the language of the Epistles and the common belief of Christians concerning Christ, is, to show how very natural is the supposition, that the authors of the New Testament narratives, if they had had any earthly purpose beyond a simple statement of facts, would have been desirous of representing Jesus as superior to every human weakness, as impassible to every form of temptation and grief. This has ever been the strong tendency, to exalt the great and good above the common attributes of humanity. But every suspicion of such a bias on the part of these writers, singularly impressed though they must have been with the greatness of Jesus, vanishes the instant we open their narratives. For we find that without the slightest attempt to explain, reconcile, or soften the apparent inconsistency, they have mentioned in the plainest terms repeated instances of human weakness in Jesus. I would not needlessly shock the reader, and therefore I observe in advance, that these instances, so far from obscuring the beauty of his character, heighten its effect. Upon this point, however, I will remark as I proceed. For the present, we have only to observe, that the instances referred to are there, on the records, expressly detailed, and unqualified by a single word of explanation.

On one occasion, and this too at the very opening of his history, when, if they had had any anxiety about the effect of the things they were going to relate, the

writers would have taken care to place Jesus in the best light, they represent him as *tempted*. It is true the temptations that assailed him are described as the suggestions of another, the Evil One. But it must be remembered that this representation is made in accordance with the rude philosophy, if so it may be termed, of the age, with the universally received idea, not that men were tempted by a malignant being assuming a visible shape, for under such circumstances the temptation of the weakest would be impossible, but that the evil thoughts and inclinations, arising in men's own minds, were to be attributed to the agency of an evil spirit. Agreeably to this opinion, the temptation of Jesus is described as the work of such a being. And in the same way any individual living at that time and in that region would in all probability have represented his own temptations, if called upon to relate them. Although it is thus described, I see no reason for supposing that the authors of the Gospels had any idea that the temptation of Jesus would be understood to differ essentially from the temptations to which other men are exposed. If tempted then, as we are, he had thoughts and imaginings, which it became him to resist and banish, and thus the common weakness of our nature is made visible in him. This his biographers have unhesitatingly recorded.

Once when he was speaking to his disciples of the sufferings and death that awaited him, Peter, who was shocked at the thought that one, whom he believed to be the Christ, should be exposed to ignominy and violence, exclaimed, "Be it far from thee, Lord! This shall not be done unto thee!" Jesus replied with great warmth and severity, and, by the strength of his language, showed that he was aware of the moral danger to which the suggestion of his warm-hearted friend ex-

posed him. "Get thee behind me, Satan, thou art an offence unto me." As if he had said, 'Hush! thou art my enemy! Wouldst thou tempt me?'

But he is placed before us, not only as tempted, but as moved by indignation, as shedding tears, nay, as overcome by the prospect of suffering, and disclosing his emotion by exclamations of distress and groans of agony.

Twice is it particularly mentioned that Jesus wept. In both cases most needless is the mention of the fact, if the writers had had any purpose beyond a straightforward account of the things they had seen and heard. Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus. But why did he weep there? Does not the narrative give us distinctly to understand that he had determined to restore the dead man to life? We should rather have expected that his whole deportment would have been expressive of joy and triumph, at the near prospect of dissipating the sorrow of his friends, and that the air of gladness produced by his secret and benevolent purpose, would have been made to appear in a striking contrast with the lamentations of those around him. But as it is, the historians tell us that he wept and groaned in spirit, and was troubled. They barely state the fact. They offer no interpretation of it. Indeed it would seem to bear no explanation but that which those present put upon it. "'Behold,' said they, 'how he loved him.' And some said, 'Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?'" So it appears that the narrative not only represents Jesus as giving way to tears, but as yielding to this weakness, when he had but little reason to weep, in morbid sympathy, for so we must esteem it, with a grief which he knew in his own heart was about to be turned into the most extravagant joy—a

grief, which, seeing as he did, what was about to take place, must have appeared to him almost groundless. Certainly, the fact of Jesus weeping under such circumstances never would have been suggested nor recorded, if the writer had thought of any thing but telling the truth.

When we duly consider it, the grief of Jesus at the grave of Lazarus, is susceptible of an explanation, not quite so obvious as that just alluded to, but an explanation which, so far from marring the character of Jesus, gives us a new impression of its extraordinary elevation. If the narrative had mentioned only that he shed tears upon seeing the tears of Mary and those who were with her, we might refer his grief to the mere impulse of sympathy. But it was no slight or transient emotion by which he was affected. He appears to have been in a state of great depression. We have three several notices of his tears or sighs on this occasion. And if we bring fully into view what he was—what were his aims and prospects, we may conjecture a probable and adequate cause of his melancholy. That he was a man of great tenderness of feeling, is evident enough from the whole genius of his religion. Even though we had no direct information concerning him, we might confidently infer from the pacific and gentle character of Christianity, that its author must have been possessed of no common degree of sensibility. Peculiarly formed by nature to appreciate the delights and consolations of human sympathy, he was cut off from all these, so far as the objects and purposes nearest his heart were concerned. There were individuals, it is true, who were affectionately attached to him, but they did not understand him. They did not enter into his lofty views and sympathize with the great aim of his life. He was deprived of all human aids. It was impossible that he should be unconscious of his loneliness—of the

profound and appalling solitude of the heart in which he stood—a stranger in the world which he loved and yearned towards with a new and unwonted love. When he stood at the grave of Lazarus, his own fate was near its consummation, and how natural is it that the tokens of human feeling and sorrow, and the sight of a grave, should bring over his mind, with peculiar vividness, a sense of his own melancholy situation—the thought of that rapidly approaching hour when he should suffer and die, without a single heart beating in unison with his! When, a few days after, Mary poured over his person the precious ointment, merely as an expression of her profound personal reverence, he immediately connected it with the thought of his death and burial. The perfumed ointment had to him the odour of the grave, and seemed as if intended to embalm his body. So, when I consider what he was, and how he stood in the world, I cannot wonder that he sighed deeply and was distressed, when the images of death and sorrow came thronging around him. That such should have been the feelings which caused him to sigh deeply and repeatedly, was touchingly natural. Besides, what a sense does it give us of his superiority to all selfish weaknesses—to every emotion of self-complacency, that he should evince such a state of mind just when he was about to work a stupendous miracle, and exercise the most astonishing power! What an idea of his greatness dawns on us, when we perceive that he was not in the slightest degree elated at the thought of the mighty work he was just about to do!

Such is the account that may be given of the melancholy of Jesus at the grave of Lazarus; and so the fact harmonizes with his character and situation. But the authors of the gospel have not breathed a single explanatory word.

When Jesus approached Jerusalem, attended by an immense multitude, shouting Hosannas, then too he wept. And then, too, it was, most probably, that he uttered the words, "Now is my soul troubled: and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour." How does his distress at such a time exalt our idea of him! Not for a moment was he blinded by the imposing demonstrations of popular favour. The whole city was moved to meet him. The excitement was so great and the exciting cause so powerful, that he declared that if the people could have been unmoved and silent, the very stones would have cried out. Harder, then, than the stones, must have been the hearts of those who remained unaffected by all that Jesus had said and done. The populace lavished upon him the most striking expressions of respect, spreading their garments before him. And he was weeping! He wept because he looked above and beyond the hour, because he was so completely elevated above the weakness of being imposed upon by the dazzling prospect of success, which his popularity at that moment may well have suggested to his mind. He saw that he was entering the city there to be condemned to death, and that the tide of popular feeling was shortly to be turned against him. The cross which he had long borne in imagination, now began to press with a close and oppressive weight upon his mind. He saw, too, the inevitable ruin of his country, and he broke forth into the pathetic cry, "O that thou hadst known, in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace! but now are they hid from thine eyes!" This incident, however, is recorded with the greatest brevity, and the narrators leave it to speak for itself, never pausing to think whether it make for their master or against him.

CHAPTER V.

THE SAME, CONTINUED.

"While he suffers, the spirit of God and glory rests upon him. There is a glory and a freshness sparkling in him by suffering, an excellency that was hidden.—He that doth and can suffer shall have my heart."—*Anon.*

THERE is one instance in which I cannot divest myself of the impression that Jesus is represented as speaking in a tone of haste and irritation. At least the historians in their fearless frankness have not breathed a word to guard us against such an impression. I refer to the exclamation, "Who is my mother, and who are my brethren!" Let us endeavour to appreciate the occasion on which these words were uttered.

In the most public manner Jesus had, by his word, relieved a man, who had lost the powers both of sight and of speech, and who, according to the current belief of the times, was under the influence of a malignant spirit. Certain Pharisees, who were among the spectators, charged Jesus with being in league with the very prince of the evil spirits. By this charge, they virtually admitted that the cure he had just wrought transcended the power of man. One cannot but feel that such inveterate perverseness of mind must have shocked him deeply. After replying to the charge in various ways, he went on to make those solemn declarations which have so often struck terror into the

minds of readers: "All manner of sin and blasphemy will be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it will be forgiven him, but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come." Now in the very form of these sentences, I think I perceive that they must have been uttered with great feeling—with the deepest emotion. They are in the shape of general propositions. They are couched in unqualified language. Deep feeling always craves this mode of expression. It delights to leap at once, from the particular circumstances which have excited it, to the annunciation of a general or universal truth, or rather, such is its magnifying power, that it immediately swells out the incident or object which has awakened it, whether it be joyous or otherwise, into a world-embracing light, or an all-obscuring darkness. It loses sight of all qualifications of time or circumstance.

And here I cannot but mourn, to think how the thrilling life of the Christian scriptures has been concealed through the irrecognition of this mode of expression, so characteristic of intense feeling. Passages, from being expressed in universal terms, have been understood as cold, formal, creedlike statements of theological dogmas, when in fact they assumed their peculiar form because those by whom they were originally uttered or written, spoke or wrote from hearts bursting with emotion. Thus, for instance, a dry, doctrinal character has been given to the language of the Apostle Paul when he says "In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing nor uncircumcision, but a new creation." And yet, when I consider the connexion of these words, I cannot help feeling that in this

general way, he was giving expression to his own burning experience. He exclaims just before, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." And then, he adds, "For in Jesus Christ, neither circumcision is of any importance, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."* What an immense change had taken place in the mind of Paul! The Cross, that instrument of suffering—that symbol of the deepest shame, had become, in its spiritual aspects, its moral manifestations, his central light, and a glory streamed from it, which was as the glory of God! Well did he say, and he must have uttered it from the fervent feeling of his own soul—'To be a Christian, is to be ushered into a new creation.' In eyes, illuminated by the moral light of the Cross of Christ, all things are changed. The old world with its artificial standards of judgment and thought, its superficial distinctions, vanishes utterly away, and a new world appears, a world, not of outward observance, but bound together by the moral influences, and irradiated by the spiritual light of the Cross of Christ.

But to return. On the occasion mentioned above, they who cavilled at the astonishing work wrought by Jesus, betrayed a moral blindness, hopeless to the last degree. A work which they confessed to be superhuman, and in which power and benevolence were miraculously displayed, they refused to refer to the agency of God. As I conceive, and as I have already said, Jesus was shocked at the impenetrable hardness of their hearts. And it is as if he had said, 'any other sin or blasphemy, of which men may be guilty, they may be forgiven, for they may repent of it; but you are past repentance, you, who speak against the Spirit

* Not 'a new creature.'

of God, so overpoweringly manifested. There is no hope of you. You cannot be moved, and of course you cannot be forgiven. Your conduct is unpardonable. He who speaks against me as a man, without knowledge of my words or works, as, no doubt, many do, may be forgiven, for he may repent; but when a man sets himself against God, against the most striking exhibitions of God's presence and agency, there is no hope for him, now, or ever.' Such I believe to be substantially the meaning of this passage. It was uttered with direct reference to a peculiar case, and in that general and unqualified manner, which the deep feeling, excited by the case, naturally prompted.

The Pharisees immediately ask Jesus for a sign. And this request in connexion with the peculiar circumstances, intimates, as I have suggested in another place, that the Pharisees were momentarily impressed by what he had done, and were ready to believe in him, if he would only do a work which should prove him to be such a Christ as they expected. That this was their state of mind is implied by what follows. For, after saying that no sign of his authority would be given them except his death and resurrection, he goes on to describe the condition of a man suffering under one of those violent maladies, which in those days were ascribed to evil spirits, and which come on by paroxysms; evidently hinting in this description at the moral condition of the Pharisees. They might appear for a little while to be forsaken by the evil spirit of unbelief which possessed them. But its departure was only temporary. It would return like other diseases with seven-fold fury and violence.

We come now to the point which I wish to make prominent. The narrative proceeds to inform us that while he was speaking, speaking, as I have represented,

with the greatest earnestness and solemnity, one said to him, "Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee." Some thoughtless individual, insensible to the import of his words and to common decorum, or, it might have been, some one, who disliked the direction his remarks were taking and was glad of an opportunity to break them off, interrupted him, telling him that his mother wanted to see him. Now it seems to me he was disturbed at the interruption, (*"ægre ferens interpellationem,"* says Kuinoel) and that the exclamation, "Who is my mother, and who are my brethren!" reveals a momentary excitement of mind. So full was he of what he was saying, and so offended, if I may be allowed the expression, that he utters himself at the instant as if he had forgotten that he had either mother or brethren.

I am unable to understand the feelings of those who can consider this incident, thus regarded, as indicating any defect in the character of Jesus. It reveals his humanity, it is true, but in so doing, in showing him affected by human feelings,—weaknesses, if you please, it heightens our reverence for him and makes him live more vividly in our faith and affections. With not a trace of human weakness, his character might have been beautiful, but its beauty would have been unreal and visionary, appealing only to the imagination. It could have had no foundation in nature, no power over the deep and active sympathies of the human soul. There is none absolutely good but one, God. We want not a character absolutely good in the person of a man, for that would be an inconsistency in the nature of things, but we want a specimen of the perfection of a nature, still seen and felt to be a human nature, possessing the inherent, ineradicable principles of humanity. My mind does not pause with the least regret over the

hasty feeling which prompted the exclamation, "Who is my mother, and who are my brethren!" but I feel all the more deeply the touching manner in which he corrects himself, the evidence he immediately gives of the tenderness of his filial and fraternal affections, when, extending his hand towards his disciples, and, as if he could say nothing more affectionate, he adds, "Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever will do the will of my Father in Heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother."

In commenting upon this passage I have followed the Gospel of Matthew. Luke relates the circumstances of the same occasion, but he does not mention that the mother of Jesus desired to see him. He only mentions that a woman of the company lifted up her voice and said unto him, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the breasts that gave thee nourishment!"* Is there not a probable coincidence here between the two narratives? Some one, as we learn from Matthew, told Jesus that his mother was waiting

* To this benediction, Jesus replied "Yea, rather blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it." Here, by the way, we have an instance of that mode of speaking, upon which I was just remarking—a proposition general in its terms, but prompted by, and applying to a particular case. It was not a formal declaration, but a spontaneous and sudden exclamation. We cannot doubt that when Jesus uttered these words, he fastened his eyes upon the woman whose language had called them forth. And it is as if he had said, "Dost thou deem my mother happy? Rather most blessed art thou if thou but know thy present privilege, and hearing what I say, bear thyself accordingly." How deeply absorbed he was with what he had just been saying, we may infer from the sensitiveness he evinces to the least disposition on the part of his hearers to think of any thing else.

When the woman uttered this benediction on the mother of Jesus, little did she dream that she uttered a sentiment to which, in the worship of the Virgin the world was for ages to respond; and which was to be embodied in the finest efforts of Art. In the adoration of the infant Jesus and his mother have we not a touching tribute to the power with which Christianity has appealed to some of the best and tenderest affections of our nature? With the manhood of Jesus the world has yet to learn to sympathise.

for him. Upon the mention of his mother, a woman, herself probably a mother, exclaimed in effect, "Thy mother! what a blessed woman thy mother must be!" The whole passage is redolent of nature and life. Is it looking at it too curiously to see in the introduction of the word, "sister," a little fraction as it were, a bright but delicate hue of truth? Observe, according to Matthew, Jesus says, "Whoever will do the will of my Father in Heaven, the same is my brother and *sister* and mother." Bringing before the imagination the whole group, keeping in view the sensibility of the woman who had just broken forth in blessing her who had borne such a son, may we not suppose that he was led, unconsciously as it were, to increase the point and emphasis of the sentiment, by the introduction of the sisterly relation—turning his eyes as he spake towards the woman?

But my present object is to illustrate the honesty of the Christian historians, evincèd in the unconcern with which they record repeated instances of human weakness in Jesus. The most striking case in point, and the last I shall mention, comprehends all the notices of his conduct and bearing at the prospect and in the agonies of death. The narrators have not hesitated to mention words and actions of his, expressive of the greatest distress at the thought of the fate that awaited him. And the extravagant explanations to which Christians in subsequent times have had recourse in their anxiety to avoid what certainly appears to be the most obvious inference, namely, that Jesus was smitten with horror at the thought of dying, only serve to place in the most striking light the simple honesty of the historians who have related the facts without one explanatory remark. Once at a comparatively early period

he is said to have exclaimed, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" In other words, 'I have a terrible trial to go through, and oh! the agony till it be over!' Again, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say!" Surely these are expressions of mortal suffering. To his betrayer he is represented as saying, "What thou doest, do quickly." Do not these words show that he felt the intolerable wretchedness of suspense? And then in the garden just before he was seized and led away to trial, what a scene of misery is disclosed! He went to that, his favourite place of resort, accompanied by the Eleven. When he reached the spot, he took his three intimate friends, bidding the rest remain where they were. In the company of these three "he began to be sorrowful and very heavy." He said to them, "my soul is exceedingly sorrowful even unto death," in other words, 'The anguish of my mind is so great I feel as if I should die.' Shortly he left these three and went apart and threw himself prostrate on his face, and prayed that if it were possible, the torture to which he was about to be put, and which he was already suffering in anticipation—the bitter cup of mortal agony, which he was about to exhaust to its very dregs, might be put aside. He returned to his three friends, and then went away again, and prayed in an agony of mind so intense that the sweat poured from him as if it had been his life-blood, and again he returned, and again he went apart by himself, uttering the same prayer every time—that he might be excused, if it were possible, from the dreadful hour which was at hand. No doubt he said much more to the same purport, but his disciples, who were exhausted probably with watching and excitement, fell asleep, awaking only for a few moments when he approached them,

and therefore catching only a few words.* Thus we are not only explicitly told that he was in an agony, but in going away by himself and returning to his friends, as he did again and again, it seems to me a state of mind is disclosed almost bordering on distraction. He turned repeatedly from man to God—from Heaven to Earth, seeking some relief, some support amidst the horrors that environed him, and for awhile seeking it in vain.

Here, surely, is a revelation of human weakness. This passage in the life of Jesus, has given occasion not only to the captious and cavilling, but even to some serious and well-disposed minds to question his fortitude, and deny him that perfectness of character which his followers have ascribed to him. Comparisons unfavourable to him, have been suggested between him and the Grecian sage, who drank the deadly hemlock without the least agitation. And Christians, it would appear, from their far-fetched explanations of this portion of the history, have been greatly embarrassed by it. It is common to say that the agony of Jesus in the garden, arose from his having then the sins of the whole world laid upon him. In this account of his suffering, there is a pretty distinct figure of speech, and that is all. It is scarcely necessary to say that there is not a whisper of any such theory of the facts, nor indeed of any explanation of them whatever. The circumstances are given with the utmost simplicity. They are not put

* It is painful to hear it asked, as it has been often, how the disciples could have seen what Jesus did, if, as they say, they were asleep; it is so easy and natural in common candour to suppose that when Jesus approached they awoke, and when he went aside they observed him for a few moments, and then their drowsiness returned. Instead of suggesting such captious queries, it becomes us to admire the unsuspecting confidence of the narrators, who were unable to conceive that any one could be so narrow—so devoid of candour, as not to supply the necessary explanations.

together in a shape to indicate any particular solution. They show no design on the part of the narrators to make out a case one way or another. So possessed do these appear with one simple object, namely a narration of facts, that so far from being on their guard against unfavourable impressions, the thought of misconstruction seems never to have occurred to them. They place Jesus before us in the greatest agony, and leave us no way of accounting for it, but by resolving it into the dread and anguish produced by the prospect of death, and its attendant horrors. The reality of this scene of suffering alone accounts for its being narrated. Had the historians been any other than the truest and most single-hearted of men, had they been conscious of any feeling but that calm and perfect confidence which truth alone can produce, they would have omitted these passages, as they might have done very easily. Can we discern such manifest inspiration—the inspiration of the Spirit of Truth, and not have every doubt superseded by a living faith?

At first view, the agony of Jesus at the thought of the terrible death that awaited him, may seem to indicate a great want of fortitude. But candidly meditated, it discloses the unparalleled greatness of his character. O compare him not with Socrates ! The Grecian philosopher was an old man, meeting death in a form comparatively mild and easy. The peasant of Judea was in the bloom of life, and a fate peculiarly excruciating and ignominious was before him. The former was surrounded by adoring, idolizing friends, who felt with him and for him, and so helped to inspire him with the requisite strength. When a man feels that there are those about him who enter into his spirit, and understand and honour his purposes, and applaud him for what he is doing, be they few or many, they

become all the world to him, and they communicate to him, unconsciously it may be, a world of spiritual force; such are the mysterious sympathies that connect man with man. And such was the support of the Athenian philosopher. But the Man of Nazareth had no human aids. With a nature of almost feminine tenderness—a heart all alive and glowing with the most generous affections, yearning towards humanity with a more than fraternal interest, he had not a single being on earth to whom he could unbosom himself. It is true there were those around him who were warmly attached to him. But they understood not the great object for which he had lived, and for which he was about to die. So far as that was concerned, the dear and sacred purpose of his being, they were to him no more than the dumb brute, who, with blind affection, follows his master. I might almost say they were less, for sympathy could not be looked for from the brute. To them it was all darkness and mystery. Jesus stood alone in the world in the profoundest sense. Peculiarly constituted to appreciate human sympathy and to be sustained by it, he saw that this prop was stricken away from beneath him. Every earthly source of strength and encouragement was closed against him. He was to suffer, suffer fearfully and alone, without having been able to make a single human being so far understand what he was to suffer for, as to derive comfort and support therefrom. To the very last, his nearest friends misconceived his purpose altogether; as the contention which arose among them at the last Supper showed only too plainly. It was, I believe, this utter loneliness that constituted the peculiar severity of his trial. Here was the bitterness of death. This it was, that made the still and lonely hour of midnight, just before his crucifixion, the hour when the soul is left to itself, un-

distracted by external sights and sound, so awful to him.* Human sympathy surrounds and sustains a man insensibly. It is like the unfelt pressure of the atmosphere, or the force of gravitation.

Had Jesus, therefore, been otherwise than most deeply affected by the circumstances in which he was placed, I confess I should have painfully felt that there was in his character a want of sensibility. It might then have been suspected that his mind was in a state of unnatural excitement—that it was deriving its strength from some stimulus provided by a diseased imagination—that he saw things around him not as they were, but in some false light. The agony he suffered satisfies me that the fortitude that followed it was the pure unadulterated quality, without any earthly admixture. The calmness which others have shown in dying, may have been produced by no higher cause than a mere sentiment of honour, more or less disguised. But in Jesus, I am now convinced that the composure, which it cannot be denied after all, he did habitually exhibit to an astonishing degree, was not a matter of temperament, or of an excited imagination, but the offspring of the purest and most elevated spirituality. He saw his condition in all its horrors, nay, he felt them acutely, and in agony of spirit, and yet he went calmly forward, to do and to endure all that was necessary. He presented himself on that memorable night with a demeanour so collected and so dignified before the persons who came to seize him, that they were for a moment overawed, and, like the soldier sent

* "Truly night was made for sleep; since to its wakeful hours belongs an oppression unknown to the very dreariest hours of day. The stillness is so deep, the solitude so unbroken, the fever brought on by want of rest so weakens the nerves, that the imagination exercises despotic and unwholesome power, till, if the heart have a fear of sorrow, up it arises in all the force and terror of gigantic exaggeration.—Anon.

to assassinate Marius, they shrunk back unable for awhile to lay hands on him. Utter insensibility to pain is scarcely any thing more than a physical quality. True fortitude is that virtue which a man exhibits amidst the consciousness of great suffering. He who is overcome at the prospect of pain and shudders at death, and yet for some generous purpose exposes himself to both, awakens in the mind a far deeper sentiment of power than he who shows himself wholly unaffected by these things.

Such, briefly, are some of the considerations which help to explain the agony of Jesus, and to put this part of his history in its true light—where it may be seen as a manifestation of the purest spiritual power, and not an exposure of weakness. I do not, of course, pretend to give a full account of the deadly anguish which he endured. No one can do this fully, until he has entered deeply into the mind and spirit of Jesus, and learned to appreciate the great spiritual purpose of his life. I cannot fathom the depths of that agony. Great as it was, his piety was greater still, and secured its perfect victory.

There remains only one particular to be noticed in this connexion, and the remarks already made render it unnecessary to dwell upon it. I allude to the language ascribed to Jesus on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" The explanations usually given of this language, and by which it is attempted to avoid the impression that it was an exclamation of momentary agony and despair, seem to me forced and unnatural, altogether too refined for the physical condition in which Jesus was. It has been interpreted, not as an expression of agony, couched in the devout language of Scripture, but as a formal and deliberate argument, as if by quoting the language of

David, Jesus wished to intimate to those around him his own Messiahship! I cannot but regard it as an ejaculation, wrung from him by the intense suffering of the moment. How does it enhance the beauty and pathos of the piety—the forgiveness, the filial affection which he manifested in that terrible hour, when we consider that these touching qualities were evinced by one so acutely sensible of pain—of a temperament so susceptible, that, for a moment, he was overwhelmed by the frightful agonies of crucifixion!

But the circumstance that arrests my attention and impresses me most powerfully, is the artless and honest brevity with which the narrators have put this exclamation of pain and despair on record. Had they not been raised above every thought of embellishing the character of Christ, they never would have mentioned a circumstance of this kind, at least without some explanation.

As the narrators are thus free from any design to show off, and exaggerate the great subject of their narratives, so is it equally clear, on the other hand, that in the composition of these stories, they were unconscious of any angry or malignant feeling towards the opposers of Jesus. They betray no desire to excite the passions of the reader against those who persecuted him. This point has been happily illustrated by Dr. Campbell, in the Dissertations preliminary to his translation of the Four Gospels. The absence of all bitterness, in the minds of these historians, is shown by their indifference about the *names* of the enemies and persecutors of Jesus. It is remarkable, as Dr. Campbell has observed,* that the names of the High Priest and his coadjutor, of the Roman Procurator, of the tetrarch

* The Four Gospels, &c. by G. Campbell, D. D., Diss. 3. Sec. 22.

of Galilee, and of the treacherous disciple, are all that are mentioned of the many who, no doubt, took an active part in the prosecution and death of Jesus. In regard to the first four, the omission of their names could have made no difference, for their offices were so public and eminent, that the official title was equivalent to the designation of the individual. And the part that Judas took was altogether too prominent and notorious, to admit the suppression of his name. "Whereas of those Scribes and Pharisees, who bargained with Judas, of the men who apprehended Jesus, of the officer who struck him, of those who afterwards spat upon him, buffeted, and mocked him, of those who were loudest in crying, 'Away with him, crucify him—not this man, but Barabbas;' of those who supplied the multitude with the implements of their mockery, of those who upbraided him on the Cross with his inability to save himself; or of the soldier who pierced his side with a spear, no name is given by any of the historians." It may be said, that the names of these individuals were not known to them. It is very probable they were not. But had the narrators been acting the part of partisans, in the accounts they have left us, had they been conscious of any angry or vindictive feeling, they would have sought the names of those who made themselves prominent in these cruel and disgraceful acts.

"This reserve, in regard to the names of those who were the chief instruments of the sufferings of Jesus, is the more observable, as the names of others, to whom no special part is attributed, are mentioned without hesitation. Thus Malchus, whose ear Peter wounded, and who was, immediately after, miraculously cured by Jesus, is named by John; but nothing further is told of him, than that he was present when our Lord was seized, and that he was a servant of the High Priest. Simon the Cyrenian, who carried the Cross, is named

by no fewer than three of the Evangelists;* but we are also informed that in this service he did not act voluntarily, but by compulsion. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are the only members of the Sanhedrim, except the High Priest, who are mentioned by name; but they were the only persons of that body who did not concur in condemning the Son of God, and who, though once fearful and secret disciples, assumed the resolution to display their affection, at times when no one else ventured openly to acknowledge him.

“Of the Scribes and Pharisees who watched our Lord, and on different occasions, dissembling esteem, assailed him with captious and ensnaring questions—of those who openly ascribed his miracles to evil Spirits, called him a madman, a demoniac, and, what they esteemed worse than either, a Samaritan, who accused him of associating with the profligate—of Sabbath-breaking—of intemperance and blasphemy, and of many others who put themselves in attitudes of opposition to Jesus, no names are ever mentioned, nor is the young, but opulent magistrate named, who came to him with the question, ‘What shall I do to inherit eternal life,’ for, though there were some favourable symptoms in his case, yet as by going away sorrowful, he betrayed a heart wedded to the world, the application did not terminate to his honour. But of Simon the Pharisee, who invited our Lord to his house, of Jairus and Bartimeus and Zaccheus and Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha, and some others, of whose faith, repentance, gratitude, love and piety, the most honourable testimony is given, a very different account is made.

“As to the disciples of Jesus, in recording their

* There appears to have been a particular reason for mentioning this individual. He was the father of Alexander and Rufus, the latter of whom appears at a subsequent period to have been a Christian of some eminence at Rome.—See Rom. xvi. 13.

faults, no secret is made of their names. Of this, the intemperate zeal of the sons of Zebedee on one occasion, and their ambition and secular views on another, the incredulity of Thomas, the presumption of Peter, and his lamentable defection in the denial of his Master, not to mention the prejudices and dulness of them all, are eminent examples. These particulars are all related with the same undisguised plainness which they use in relating the crimes of adversaries, and with as little endeavour to extenuate the former, as to exaggerate the latter."

And yet, after all, there is nothing studied in the style of these narrations, no appearance of care or pains taken to suppress one name, or introduce another. There is throughout an impressive forgetfulness of effect. It is common to speak of the authors of the four Gospels, as *witnesses*. But the idea of a witness conveys the impression of one speaking guardedly, as upon his oath, and as in the presence of individuals ready to cross-examine, and to doubt. But there is no appearance of this kind about these historians. When the mind is fully impressed and completely filled with any truth, whether of opinion, sentiment or fact, we find it impossible to think that others cannot see things just, as we have seen them. What is so obvious and present to us, we imagine must be equally so to all. This appears to have been the predominant feeling in the minds of the writers of the Christian narratives. To them, the reality of the facts they record, was as indisputable as that of the sun in heaven, and abidingly filled with this conviction, they could not sympathise with the doubting, and the incredulous. They lived, and moved, and spoke, and wrote, with the truth of the things they relate filling and surrounding their minds like an atmosphere.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CONSISTENCY OF THE GOSPELS.

"I should have laid little stress upon the repetition of actions substantially alike, or of discourses containing many of the same expressions, because that is a species of resemblance, which would either belong to a true history, or might easily be imitated in a false one. Nor do I deny, that a dramatic writer is able to sustain propriety and distinction of character, through a great variety of separate incidents and situations. But the evangelists were not dramatic writers; nor possessed the talents of dramatic writers; nor will it, I believe, be suspected that they studied uniformity of character, or ever thought of any such thing in the person who was the subject of their histories. Such uniformity, if it exists, is on their part casual."

PALEY.

IN these histories there is one personage who holds the first place, and of whose words and acts and sufferings they are obviously sketches. There are other individuals introduced more or less conspicuously. And they are as easily distinguishable as so many personal acquaintances. Now it is the remarkable peculiarity of these writings that the vivid and consistent ideas which they give us of the persons whom they mention, are communicated without the least appearance of design, or even of consciousness on the part of the narrators. They do not seem to be in the slightest degree aware that they are enabling the reader to form clear conceptions of the personal characters of those of whom they speak. This is a characteristic of these writings, which admits of copious and striking illustrations, and which to my mind establishes their authority as true

histories beyond all controversy. Their authors have related a number of incidents in the briefest and most sketchy manner, unaccompanied by comments, and with no special regard to any sort of order, even to the order of time. So true is this that there is hardly any thing more difficult to determine than the precise period occupied by the events which they relate. And yet by means of these incidents, thus carelessly strung together, we come at distinct, harmonious ideas of the persons presented in the scene. In this respect, these narratives resemble those curious pictures that we sometimes see, which at first view appear to be nothing more than representations of landscapes, composed of trees, rocks and ruins. But on closer inspection, we discover that the objects depicted are so grouped as to form complete and symmetrical figures, in attitudes of life, grace, and motion. And this effect is so successful that although not obvious, yet when once perceived, it can hardly by any effort be lost sight of. Only in the case of these histories, the several forms of moral life resulting from the incidents related are, let me repeat, produced wholly without design. The writers betray no sort of suspicion of what they were doing.

That this harmony of character should have been the work of accident or cunning is entirely out of the question. Material objects, or the representations of material objects, may be so put together as to form momentary and chance resemblances of living forms and features. The fantastic combinations of the clouds of a summer sunset may present the rude appearance of a castle, a warrior, or some huge animal; and this only for a little while.

“That, which is now a horse, even with a thought,
The rack dislimns; and makes it indistinct,
As water is in water.”

But those occurrences must have an existence in truth whose keeping is so natural as to create in the most natural manner in our minds individual and complete and permanent ideas of intellectual and moral life. From a mere disjointed collection of falsehoods and fables such a result could never flow. They might be circumstantially, but they never could be morally and intellectually consistent.

Does it not constitute the chief miraculousness of the genius of Shakspeare, that adopting a form of composition, the Dramatic, which allows little or no room for the direct and elaborate delineation of character, he has been able somewhat in the way now referred to, to construct spiritual forms consistent with themselves and standing out individually before us, through the words they are made to speak, and the scenes, acts, and sufferings in which they are represented as concerned. But even in the case of Shakspeare's creations, the moral consistency which renders them so wonderful is wrought out, not indeed with any apparent labour on the part of the artist, but only by means of numerous and diversified illustrations. The characters, which his genius creates and inspires, are made to do and to bear and to say much in order to their full unfolding. Whereas, in the New Testament histories, character is developed, as we shall see, by the briefest word and the slightest incident, and if they are fictions, then as works of genius, they leave the productions of Shakspeare as far behind as these excel all others.

Without farther preliminary remark, I proceed to illustrate my meaning by examples, the consideration of which will suggest appropriate reflections.

There are two females, Mary and Martha, mentioned three or four times very briefly in the course of these narratives. Once, as we read, Jesus "went to

a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered with much serving, and came to him and said, 'Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone, bid her therefore that she help me.' And Jesus answered, and said unto her, 'Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful. and Mary hath chosen that good part that shall not be taken away from her.'" Again these two sisters are mentioned more particularly in the account of the raising of Lazarus. They are introduced once more in the next chapter of John, where we are told that Mary came and poured very precious ointment upon Jesus, while he sat at meat.

Now, there is no attempt to describe the distinctive qualities of these two individuals. They occupy only a small place in the scene. They appear before us but for a moment at a time, and they say and do but little. And yet they stand out with wonderful distinctness. Their images are not blended and intermixed. Their characteristic features are unveiled in the most incidental manner—by a word; a breath lifts the veil, and their faces once seen are never to be confounded.

From the first notice of them we gather that Martha was possessed of an active, matter-of-fact temperament, and that if not by age, by right of her peculiar character, she took the lead in household concerns. She set herself immediately at work to provide an ample entertainment for her beloved guest, and had so little sympathy with Mary, so imperfect an appreciation of the real greatness of Jesus, so little of the sensibility which was so prominent in her sister, that she complained of Mary, and invoked the authority of Jesus, to

obtain her sister's aid in her domestic labours. I pray the reader, now, to mark the beautiful correspondence of the other notices of the sisters with their characters thus incidentally developed.

When, upon the death of Lazarus, their brother, Jesus approached Bethany, the village where they dwelt, and the rumour of his coming preceded him, it was Martha that first heard it, and went forth to meet him. Mary sat still in the house. Martha, we may suppose, was engaged in the active concerns of the household. How naturally the report of the approach of Jesus came to her ears first! Mary, with her greater tenderness of mind, was in a retired part of the house. The custom of the age and country allowed the afflicted to spend seven days in the indulgence of grief, and in receiving visits of condolence. With the disposition of Mary this custom harmonised, and she naturally availed herself of it. On any other occasion—under any other circumstances, Mary, we may suppose, would have been the first to hasten to meet Jesus. As it was, Martha went first, because she first heard that he was coming. Mary went as soon as she was informed of his approach. If Mary had heard that Jesus was coming, before she learned it from Martha, then her friends from Jerusalem, who were with her, must have known it also, and they would have suspected whither she was going, and not have supposed that she was going to the grave to weep there.

And then how characteristic the manner in which the sisters meet their venerated Friend. They both addressed him in the same words, and the coincidence is very natural, because the thought which they expressed must have been continually uppermost in their minds. They had perhaps said the same thing to each other and to themselves a thousand times. "If thou

hadst been here, my brother had not died!"* But while Martha was able to enter into conversation with Jesus, unembarrassed by her feelings, Mary as soon as she saw him uttered a few words, and then fell at his feet in an agony of tears.

When he directed the stone to be removed from the mouth of the sepulchre, observe it is Martha, and not Mary, who interferences, questioning the propriety of the direction, and betraying the coarse turn of her mind; "Lord! by this time he is offensive, for he hath been dead four days!" Such a suggestion, we perceive, came naturally from her. Mary's reverence for Jesus was too profound to permit her to object to any thing he might propose. While Martha, constitutionally incapable of as deep a feeling, presumed to speak as if he knew not what he was doing.

We have only one mention more of Mary and Martha. Shortly after Lazarus had been raised from the dead, Jesus again visited Bethany. 'Martha served. But Mary brought a quantity of costly ointment and poured it upon his person.† By this act, she simply intended to express her personal reverence for Jesus. How like herself is the attitude in which she is here represented! Perfumes and ointments formed a part of the offices of hospitality. But the use of an ointment so precious was a mark of extraordinary respect, and showed how deeply Mary revered Jesus.

Let the incidents just briefly specified be pondered well. Mark their exceeding brevity, and the accidental manner in which they are introduced. And yet how

* This coincidence is no slight evidence of the unsuspecting integrity of the narrator. If the story were fictitious, its author would scarcely have ventured, without some explanation, to put the same words into the mouths of the sisters, as it would certainly appear at first sight to want verisimilitude.

† See Chap. X. Part II.

clear are the impressions we receive from them of the characters of the two sisters. Two or three—and as to any design on the part of the narrators,—random strokes, and the moral features of Martha and Mary are before us in all the freshness of nature. The outlines are complete, never running into each other, and formed not purposely, but by the combination of a few brief incidents. Let those believe who can, that the circumstances related from which we have this result, are matters of fiction and not of fact.

It will help us to estimate the characteristic of the New Testament histories, which I am now illustrating, to glance at the works of imagination abounding at the present day, and observe how striking is the contrast between them, and the writings under consideration, in this respect. There is no department of Literature in which human genius is so active and triumphant, as in the composition of fictitious narratives. Within a few years, through an alliance with history, an extraordinary revolution has been produced in this class of writings. The novelist nowadays prepares himself for his work by the acquisition of an extensive and familiar acquaintance with the customs, the opinions, the whole condition of the period at which he lays the scene of his story, and is thus enabled to throw over it an imposing air of truth. And yet, after all, how much pains do the most gifted,—does the great Northern Story-teller himself, take to impart to his readers distinct and consistent impressions of the characters in which he aims to awaken interest! How continually are we made to feel that incidents are either fabricated or coloured in order to bring out character, or else, for the sake of the story, occurrences are introduced which violate the consistency of the characters portrayed. I am reminded in this connexion by the force of the con-

trast of the well-known romance of 'the Pirate.' If so familiar an illustration may be allowed, we have only to observe the care which the novelist has taken to discriminate the characters of Minna and Brenda, to perceive how immeasurably more striking is the brief scriptural representation of Mary and Martha. In the novel, every thing is done to assist the conceptions of the reader by a minute personal description of the two heroines, and they are thrown into circumstances calculated to bring out their respective peculiarities in the most prominent manner. Whereas in those rapid sketches of the New Testament, the incidents which so consistently and admirably unfold the characters of Mary and Martha are told with the utmost brevity, and if for the sake of showing off any one, it is with a view to the character of Christ. But natural even as such a design might be, it does not appear to have been entertained. The occurrences related, with all the light they throw upon the moral features of the individuals concerned, seemed to be mentioned for no reason but their simple truth. They had taken place. They were real and therefore they were related.

The character of Peter is developed in a similar way. Not the shadow of an attempt to describe him is visible. But we cannot take up these narratives at any passage where he is mentioned, without recognising him as readily as we recognise the countenance of a familiar friend.

For the sake of illustration, let me crave the attention of the reader, while I endeavour to revive an incident that occurred at the last Supper, mentioned in the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of John. Let us for a moment leave the world in which we live, and go back some eighteen hundred years into the past, and

enter Jerusalem, the capital of that nation, which, of all the nations of antiquity, was the only one that worshipped one God, using no similitudes—no idols.

It is the season of the Passover, a great national festival celebrating the ancient providence of Heaven. The city is crowded with Jews from all parts of Judea, and from remote regions. Its numerous dwellings are now occupied by friendly and family parties, observing the appointed ceremonies of the occasion, which consisted principally of a social entertainment, at which the mercies of God in times past were commemorated with appropriate forms. In a large upper room are assembled thirteen individuals from Galilee. Extraordinary circumstances, as their looks and tones indicate, have given a peculiar interest to the occasion. They have the air of men excited by strange events, and high but vague expectations. One among them is clearly shown to be their chief, by the deference which is paid him. They seem to regard him as a prince in disguise, a being of no common authority. He takes the principal place at the table, and as they also seat themselves, there is a struggle for precedence.* They are evidently jealous of one another; and a contention

* The strife at the last Supper is not mentioned by John. A notice of it is found in Luke. But even if there were no mention of it in any of the Gospels, we might infer that something of the kind took place from what is related. The words and actions of Jesus were almost always suggested by some passing incident. And I cannot but suppose that the striking lesson which he gave his disciples when he washed their feet, was prompted by some evidence, afforded at the moment by their conduct, of their need of it. The nature of the contention, which, I suppose, arose among them, also appears to be indicated by the very form of instruction which their master adopted—the performance of a menial service for them. In taking their places at the table, a dispute probably arose, and jealous looks were exchanged. And to show them how entirely out of place such feelings were, he performed for them the lowest office at a social entertainment. This view of the case seems to reveal the propriety and significance of the symbolical act, by which Jesus sought to convey a moral impression.

arises among them which shall be the first. They are inflamed by the prospect of the wealth and honours which he, whom they acknowledge as their master, is, as they conceive, shortly to distribute among them, and the desire of these worldly advantages then, as always, awakens feelings of animosity and ill-will. With these earthborn passions, however, the countenance of their Leader betrays no sympathy. A sublime purpose—a singular and mysterious destiny has thrown over his whole appearance an expression of unearthly greatness. There in that face, in wonderful harmony, the melancholy cast by the shadows of Suffering and Death is blended with a peace kindled by light from an invisible source. In the midst of the strife of his followers, which evidently pains him deeply, for it seems to show that all he had yet said and done, and it was not a little, had been of no avail,—he quietly rises from the table, lays aside his principal garments, takes a towel, pours water into a basin, and then kneels and begins to wash the feet of one of the company. Immediately the harsh sounds of discord are hushed. Silence reigns through the apartment. Every angry passion dies away—every angry glance is lost in the looks of questioning and amazement which the disciples exchange with one another. He goes from one to the other, washing their feet; and they, struck dumb with the awe which he habitually inspired, offer no resistance, until he comes to one who, unable to repress his feelings, shrinks back, exclaiming, “Lord! dost thou wash my feet?” The Master replies, “What I am doing thou dost not understand now, but thou shalt know shortly.” “Thou shalt never wash my feet,” rejoins his follower. “If I wash thee not,” says Jesus, “thou hast no part with me.” “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!” cries the

disciple, accompanying the words, no doubt, with a movement full of expression.

The character of Jesus is not now our topic. Still I cannot avoid a brief allusion to the agreement of this passage with all that we elsewhere learn of him. How perfectly in character the method by which he sought to teach his friends to defer to one another! Since all that he had already said and done had failed to inspire them with a generous spirit, it would seem as if he adopted this method as a last resort, intending, we might almost think, to shock them by the attitude he assumed, the office he discharged, resolved to make an impression upon their minds never to be effaced. And then, too, how wisely and characteristically did he manage his resisting follower, melting him down with the words "if I *wash* thee not," i. e., if I do not cleanse thee, (to thy heart's core,) "thou hast no part with me." Thus he avoided an explanation of what he was about, until he had gone round and performed the same menial service for all, and so rendered the impression as strong as possible. "If," the disciple exclaims, in effect, "if thou put it on that ground—if my place in thine heart be in question, then wash me all over."

Who now requires to be informed that it was Peter with whom this short conversation took place? His speech bewrayeth him. As in the Hall of the High Priest's house, his accent proved him to be a Galilean, so all that he says and does shows him to be Peter, and no other. We discover here the same individual who a little while after, when Jesus told his disciples they could not follow him then, (through the rugged and bloody path by which he was to be perfected,) protested, "Lord! why cannot I follow thee now, I will lay down my life for thy sake," and yet, shortly after, upon

a change of circumstances, denied all knowledge of Jesus. This is he—the very man—we know him at once—who can help recognising him?—that, upon another occasion, after Jesus had commended him for the explicit avowal of his faith, exclaiming, “Blessed art thou, Simon son of Jonas,” and pronouncing him the rock upon which he would build his religion, was so emboldened by the praise, that, when his master immediately afterwards was telling his disciples how he was about to suffer and die, he had the forwardness to contradict and rebuke Jesus, saying, “Be it far from thee, Lord, this shall not be done unto thee,” and so incurred a reproof as severe as the previous commendation was warm. This is the same individual who, yet at another time, when he saw his master coming on the water toward him and his fellow-disciples, who were in a vessel on the Lake of Galilee, cried out, “Bid me now come unto thee on the water,” and when, at the bidding of Jesus, he had left the ship, and the waves were rolling around him, was so overpowered with terror, that he exclaimed, “Lord! save me, or I perish!” In all these instances we see the same moral individual—the same self-confidence—the same sudden fluctuations of feeling. It is not putting the case too strongly to say, that if the name of Peter were stricken out in all these passages, and, instead, we were merely told that one of the disciples said or did so and so, *that* one disciple would stand forth to our minds in bold and unmarred individuality. We could not mistake him. No one could suppose that the writer or writers of the New Testament had any intention—any thought of communicating to us an idea of Peter. And yet such an idea is received far more vividly than it could have been from the most minute and laboured description. No one has ever read the

New Testament with any degree of attention without gathering from it an impression of Peter, distinct and peculiar. And yet, let it not be forgotten, no care is taken by the historians to produce this impression. It is the direct but undesigned result of a simple record of a few simple facts. This is that divine harmony of nature, that truthful consistency, which infinitely outweighs all the discrepancies of words and dates, and which the most transcendent genius may imitate, but never equal.

The impression derived from the Gospels of the moral character of the Roman Procurator, Pontius Pilate, is wonderfully vivid and consistent; especially when we consider how brief is his appearance in the Divine Drama. He had degenerated greatly from the old Roman nobleness. Want of moral strength was his chief trait. This defect continually produces results as disastrous as those that flow from a determined malignity of purpose. Men of good feelings, but destitute of the guidance of a good principle, bring calamities upon themselves and others, as heavy as if they were actuated by the basest motives, and had deliberately said unto evil, 'Be thou our good!' Of the truth of this remark, Pilate affords an ever memorable instance. That such was his character is most evident from the Christian records. Almost every word attributed to him is in keeping with it. He appears to have been persuaded of the innocence of Jesus, but he had not courage to resist the mob headed by the priests. And the miserable expedients to which he had recourse to throw off his inevitable responsibility, all betray the same imbecility.

He first tried to get rid of the case altogether—to make the Jews settle it themselves.

Failing in this, he caught at the mention of Galilee, and as soon as he was told that Jesus was a Galilean, he sent him to Herod who was then at Jerusalem, and within whose jurisdiction Galilee was. But Herod returned the prisoner upon his hands.

As the next resort he attempted to persuade the populace to bestow their mercy upon Jesus, rather than Barabbas.

I am aware that it was customary among the Romans to scourge those condemned to be crucified, just before execution. But from the different accounts we are led to infer, that Pilate caused this part of the punishment to be inflicted on Jesus under the idea that it would appease the Jews. He brought the prisoner forth, bleeding under the recent tortures of the scourge, and called the attention of the mob to him, as if he hoped thereby to induce them to relent. Is not this precisely the course a weak man under such circumstances would adopt, as if by yielding he would not inflame and encourage the cruel passions of the people instead of subduing them?

When Jesus, seeing that words were of no avail, and that the magistrate had no strength to withstand the priests, preserved a dignified silence, Pilate attempts to make him speak by reminding him of his power. "Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to release thee, and have power to crucify thee?" How palpable here is his cowardice in the idle vaunt of a power existing, as he must have known in his own soul, only in name!

He was awed too, as indeed a much stronger man might, and so weak a man must have been, by the look and bearing of the prisoner, connected with the rumour of his extraordinary career, which could not have failed to reach his ears; with the dream of his wife, whose

imagination, no doubt, had been excited by reports of the words and works of the remarkable person arraigned before her husband, and with the declaration of the priests that Jesus had called himself the Son of God.

And then again, the symbolical act of washing his hands before all the people, to which the numbers and uproar of the mob compelled Pilate to have recourse, to signify that he had nothing to do with the death of Jesus, expressive though it was, was utterly vain. He could not throw off the responsibility of his office as he dashed the water from his hands; and only a weak-minded man could have found any satisfaction in such a device.

When the Jews indirectly menace him with an accusation of a want of loyalty to the Roman Emperor, he is evidently alarmed and overborne. And he endeavours to conceal the effect of the threat under a ridicule, which he dwells upon so long that we may well suspect it to be affected. "No man," Dr. Johnson has somewhere observed, "thinks much of that which he despises." Thus Pilate repeats the title of King in application to Jesus, too often to allow it to be believed that he really ridiculed and despised the charge which the Jews threatened to allege against him. "Behold your king!" he said to the Jews. And when they shouted, "Away with him, crucify him," he replies, "Shall I crucify your king?" And the inscription which he caused to be affixed to the Cross in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek—"This is the King of the Jews," and which he refused to alter, was partly dictated we may suppose by this state of mind, and partly by the mean desire of ridiculing the Jews and so revenging himself upon them for the painful fears they had awakened in his breast. That a suspicion of his

loyalty should have made such an impression upon Pilate, cannot surprise us when we bring into view his subsequent fate,—banishment upon a charge of treason,—and the distrustful character of the reigning Emperor, Tiberius. With this prince, as Tacitus informs us, the charge of treason was the sum of all charges.

In the instance of Pilate, as in the other cases mentioned, how all-unconscious are the narrators of the consistency they have preserved ! They have thought only of giving a simple relation of the things they had seen and heard. And the keeping, discernible between the details of their histories, is the natural result and accompaniment of real facts, a portion of that harmony pervading all real objects, all actual occurrences. In short, we behold here the presence of that Divinity that not only shapes our ends, but impresses and moulds all realities, abrupt, rough-hewn, and disjointed as they may at first seem.

I cannot altogether omit a brief reference to the disciple John, as an example of that trait which we are now considering. From all the Gospels we gather that he was one of the three favourite friends of Jesus. Not much is told of him, but he speaks of himself as the especial object of the Master's love. But he shows no consciousness of the evidence he gives in support of this character when he tells us that he sat next to Jesus at the last supper and leaned upon his bosom. How beautiful too is the correspondence between his intimacy with his venerated Friend, and the benign and spiritual tenor of his Epistles !

A similar consistency is maintained in the notices, not only of individuals, but also of whole classes of men. The Pharisees are represented as attaching the first

importance to forms, to external rites, disregarding the moral requisitions of the Law, cherishing without restraint the most selfish and corrupt passions. Every thing ascribed to them, accords with this representation. At one time they are on the watch to see whether Jesus would perform a cure on the Sabbath. Zealous for the sacredness of that day, they had no hearts for a work of mercy. At another they pronounced him a Sabbath-breaker, because on that day he had not only given sight to a man born blind, but had done it in disregard of that tradition, which regarded it as a profanation of the Sabbath to use any medicaments on that day, even so much as to put saliva on the eyes. Again they deem it a serious charge against the disciples of Jesus that he did not require them to observe frequent fasts, and that, regardless of the danger of uncleanness, they did not scrupulously wash their hands before eating. When they carried Jesus before the Roman magistrate, thirsting for his blood, the Pharisees refused to enter the Gentile Hall of judgment, lest they should contract ceremonial pollution and be unfitted for the observance of the Pass-over. And once more, they could clamour for the blood of the innocent, but they could not endure that the bodies of the crucified should remain upon the crosses, exposed to public view, defiling the Sabbath and the Festival. All these things are related briefly and incidentally, without any effort to point out their agreement, nay, without any consciousness that this agreement is at all worthy of note.

So also the words and feelings attributed to that little band, the personal followers of Jesus, harmonise wonderfully, but most naturally with one another, with all that we know of human nature, and with the pro-

bable circumstances of the case. They were evidently men possessing no small degree of ingenuousness. Their hearts were open to the spiritual power and beauty of the instructions and character of Jesus. He impressed and won their affections. Still they shared in the universal expectation of the times. And while they venerated and loved him, they still clung to him with mixed motives, in part with worldly views and hopes. At quite an early period, upon being interrogated by him as to what they supposed him to be, they avowed through Peter, that they believed him to be the Messiah. To have come so early to such a conclusion manifested great openness of mind. It showed how much they had been impressed by the moral wisdom he had uttered, the deeds of mercy he had wrought. By these they were convinced, although he had neither declared himself to be the Messiah, nor had he done any thing conformable to their idea of that expected Deliverer, nor did his external appearance present any thing of the magnificence which they had identified with that illustrious personage. Still they did not relinquish the darling hope of a splendid kingdom. They are continually betraying the tenacity with which they cling to it. Once they asked their master, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?"—a general question apparently. But when we observe that a little while before they were quarrelling among themselves, who among them should be the first in the approaching empire,—when we consider the reply of Jesus, who beckoned a little child to him, and told them they could never so much as enter the heavenly kingdom (a moral kingdom) until they gave up all their prepossessions and became as docile in his hands as that little child,—we perceive that, although they couched their question in general terms, their object was to ascertain who among themselves

was to be the chief officer under the new dispensation. Again, when Jesus declared that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, meaning obviously by this declaration, that it was next to impossible for one accustomed to the self-indulgence of wealth to descend voluntarily to the despised and persecuted condition of those who sought with him to effect a grand moral revolution,—the disciples were exceedingly astonished, and exclaimed, ‘who then can be saved!’ The salvation they were thinking of, was a political deliverance, and they could not understand how there could be any salvation, any kingdom, if the rich were to have no part in it. Jesus perceiving that they were not yet able to bear a further disclosure of the true character of the approaching dominion, forbore to shock them any more, contenting himself with assuring them, that although it appeared to be impossible to them, for the heavenly kingdom to be established without rich men, yet it was very possible with God. Still they are uneasy, and Peter, no doubt expressing the wishes of his fellow disciples, and deeming it high time to come to an understanding, immediately asks, “And what shall we have therefore, we, who have left all and followed thee?” So deep was their impression that he would establish an external kingdom, that after his death, they sorrowfully exclaim, “We had thought it had been he who was to redeem Israel.” And just before his final disappearance their inquiry is, “Lord, wilt thou now restore the kingdom to Israel?”

With these coarse, worldly expectations, it is beautiful to see how there was growing up in their minds a deep sentiment of reverence and affection for Jesus,—a disposition to defer to his authority before which their earthly hopes were destined slowly to recede, and, if never to be formally abandoned, yet to lose all

vital influence. It was their hearts that were first touched, and that were gradually expanded, until the narrowing bands of their prejudices were broken. The evidence of their personal attachment for Jesus is seen in the fidelity with which they adhered to him, despite the example of the great and powerful, and the continued inconsistency of his words and conduct with all they had so confidently expected. Once and again they were afraid to question him, so great was their awe of him. And their great respect for their master is incidentally shown at the Last Supper, as we once heard it finely remarked by a friend. When their master declared that one of them would betray him, they did not resent the accusation, but in the spirit of a touching self-distrust, which their experience of his better wisdom had taught them to cherish, the cry broke forth on every side, "Lord, is it I?" "Is it I?" When one whom we deeply reverence charges us with an evil design, we suspect ourselves of it, rather than him of a wanton accusation. So was it with the personal friends of Jesus.

But all this appears in the narratives in the most accidental manner possible. It may be said that it is all a matter of inference. I acknowledge freely that it is so. On this very account, because it is so plainly undesigned, it is affecting and decisive. That the Gospel histories admit of inferences so accordant with nature, so consistent one with another, is to my mind an irresistible sign of truth. It is a sign from heaven. To truth alone can such perfect harmony belong.

Of the unconscious consistency which is so distinguishing a feature of the New Testament narratives, there is one illustration, in comparison with which the instances already mentioned, striking as they are, sink

into insignificance. I allude to that great moral wonder, the character of Jesus Christ. The other characters brought into view in the Christian records are, in their prominent traits, of no peculiar and uncommon kind. They indeed stand out before us fully and individually, without any pains taken by the narrators to produce this effect. Still they may be severally assigned to classes, with which the daily intercourse of life and our common observation of human nature have rendered us familiar. Who has not often met with persons resembling Mary and Martha, Peter, John and Pilate in their principal features? But the character of Jesus stands alone, without precedent or pattern. It constitutes a specimen—a model by itself. The history of the world furnishes us with no other instances to be classed along with it. Here the loftiest and loveliest attributes of humanity meet, fully developed in one individual. In his person, not only are conjoined in the profoundest harmony those remarkable qualities, which have been exhibited by different men at remote intervals, “every creature’s best,” but we discern new forms of virtue, a new manifestation of greatness.

Although through the extravagant errors which have prevailed concerning the nature of Christ, his character has been but very partially apprehended, still it has generally been felt to be the grand argument for Christianity. But it appears to me that the very remarkable manner in which it is bodied forth in the Four Gospels has never arrested the attention which it deserves. For my own part, I am at a loss to say which is the most astonishing, the character itself, or the way in which it is exhibited by the historians of the life of Jesus.

In him we have a new and original specimen of

human nature. If he never had an existence—if he were a fictitious personage, it is evident that the writers of his life had no model to go by. But while he is original, he is at the same time perfectly natural. He is an harmonious whole, a self-consistent individual. This is abundantly enough to satisfy me of his reality. For it is not for minds deluding or deluded, and one or the other we must suppose the New Testament authors to have been if we do not admit their truth, it is not for such minds, nor is it within the ability of any human mind to produce a new creation,—to make a new form of humanity, stamped all over with the truth and naturalness which characterize only the works of nature and of God.

But this is not all. The crowning wonder still is the manner in which the character of Jesus is placed before us. At once, in the highest degree, new and natural, it is nowhere elaborately described in the four Gospels. There is not the slightest appearance of an attempt at minute description or analysis. That the writers felt most deeply the force of the character of Jesus, is not to be doubted. But, (and perhaps for this very reason, because they felt it so deeply,) they do not endeavour to define its force, or to point out wherein its peculiar greatness and beauty lay.* In the briefest and most rapid manner they have related a variety of occurrences in which he bore a conspicuous part. Their narrations show no traces of care or

* "To analyze the characters of others, especially of those whom we love, is not a common or natural employment of men at any time. We are not anxious unerringly to understand the constitution of the minds of those who have soothed, who have cheered, who have supported us; with whom we have been long and daily pleased and delighted. The affections are their own justification. The Light of Love in our Hearts is a satisfactory evidence that there is a body of worth in the minds of our friends or kindred, whence that light has proceeded."—*Wordsworth, Essay on Epitaphs.*

labour, no pains to put things together in a way to assist the reader to form, I say not a consistent idea of Jesus, but so much as any idea of him at all. They seem to be possessed with only one very plain and natural purpose—a simple relation of the things they had seen and heard, as they appeared to them. The reader may find a sufficient exemplification of these remarks, in the instances which I have already adduced in another connexion. Still one case occurs to me so strikingly in point that I must mention it here.

Once, as we read, a young man, of a very winning appearance, came and knelt before Jesus, saying, "Good master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He is rebuffed with the reply, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, God." Again, when a woman, with an amiable sensibility, broke forth in blessing the mother of Jesus, his language is, "Yea, rather blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it." Now these instances would seem to imply in Jesus an extreme sensitiveness to any disposition on the part of those around him, to magnify him personally. And yet, when Mary came and poured that costly ointment upon him, an act whereby she expressed the greatest personal reverence, he upheld the propriety of the apparent waste, and paid no respect to the very plausible suggestion—"Why was not this ointment sold, and given to the poor?" A consideration of the respective circumstances of the three occasions alluded to will satisfy us, that the language of Jesus, on each occasion, was expressive of, and consistent with, a healthy sensibility of mind. We shall recur to these passages of his life more particularly hereafter. In the meanwhile it is interesting to observe, that for all that appears in the letter of the narratives, there is a downright inconsistency. Looking only at what they ex-

pressly mention, we scarcely recognise the same individual in him who so willingly received the costly offering of Mary's reverence, and yet so promptly rejected the respectful address of the young ruler at one time, and at another, sought so instinctively to give a different direction to the sensibility of the female who poured out her benedictions upon his mother. Here is most impressive evidence, to my mind, that the writers of his history were wholly unconscious of any attempt to portray his moral features, or to communicate an individual idea of him. They are entirely occupied with the facts, the particulars that had passed before their eyes, and they leave all conclusions and inferences to take care of themselves.

Now this, I say, is the great and all-satisfying miracle—that from histories of this description we are able to form in our minds a distinct and consistent conception of an individual, such as the world has never seen before nor since. If, indeed, instead of being what they are, the Four Gospels were careful and laboured descriptions of Jesus Christ, profound critical analysis of his moral traits, even in this case I should be at a loss to understand how so grand a moral idea could ever have been suggested to the human mind but by reality. In its reality I should find the most obvious and sufficient cause of its existence. But as it is, it is immeasurably more surprising that from such books as those of the New Testament, for the most part the merest record of particulars briefly told, we should come at a result so novel, sublime, and yet so perfectly natural. Thinking only, as it appears, of relating what they had seen and heard, with such faculties and opportunities as Providence had granted them, the authors of these histories have furnished us, without appearing to know it, with the means of forming an

idea of individual character, the most harmonious and the most kindling,—an idea that appeals to our best sentiments, animates our noblest springs of action, and transfigures our whole nature, through the veneration it commands, the imitation which it urges us to attempt. Surely an idea so generous in its influence, possessing so practical a power, so accordant with the highest nature of man, must be founded in reality. A mere fiction, the offspring of ignorant delusion or selfish cunning, never could have such an effect. Otherwise, all distinctions between the true and the false are broken down and obliterated.

The character of Christ, as I have already remarked, has as yet been very imperfectly understood. It would almost seem to require another Messiah to do justice to the first. It is not for this age, far less for this feeble pen, adequately to portray his pure spiritual glory. That I approach this subject, therefore, with a diffidence almost amounting to despair, I pray the reader to believe. Happy shall I be, if to a single mind I can communicate one quickening impression, impart one inspiring glimpse of Him, in whom are hid treasures of life, and truth, and good. If on any occasion it is appropriate to invoke the inspiration of a higher power,—if my heart ever heaves with unuttered prayers for light and grace,—for the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, it is when I approach this theme with a desire to depict its glories. What eye, dimmed by mortality, shall behold Jesus Christ as he is!

In the foregoing pages, my principal aim has been to illustrate the style and spirit of the New Testament historians. But in fulfilling this purpose it is impossible, even were it desirable, to speak of the character of the

writers without remarking also, more or less at length, upon the character of their subject. They naturally illustrate each other. Thus far I have kept this last topic, secondary and incidental. I shall now reverse the relation, making the life and character of Jesus, the principal theme, and illustrating the style of his biographers only incidentally. Thus the present work divides itself into Two Parts, the first of which is terminated here.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

THE NATIVITY.

"Can it at all lessen the credibility of the two Evangelists, (Matthew and Luke,) that each admitted into his history (of the Nativity) some passages not purely historical? Certainly not with a candid judge, who considers that all this serves still only as a prelude to the proper subject of the history, which was the Public Life of Jesus." *Schleiermacher, Critical Essay on the Gospel of St. Luke, English Trans. p. 51.*

IN the examination of the notices of the Birth of Jesus of Nazareth, there are certain considerations to be attended to, which, although they may not lead us near enough to the truth to enable us to discern its precise form, are nevertheless indispensable guides, so far as they go.

Receiving the sketches, that have come down to us, of the life of Jesus as simple human histories, the productions of honest and intelligent men, while we acknowledge their substantial truth, we cannot possibly avoid admitting the liability of their authors to error. To hold the Gospels to be human compositions and to maintain their absolute freedom from mistake are ideas wholly irreconcilable. For it is of the nature of every thing human to be marked with imperfection. But because these writings, being human, are necessarily

imperfect, to assert that they lose all claim to trustworthiness, is a very precipitate and dangerous conclusion. A perfect human work is, in strict terms, not an impossibility, but an absurdity. We might as well speak of a perfect imperfect work. The pretension therefore in behalf of any book to absolute perfection, might justly provoke skepticism and "cast ominous conjecture on its whole success." On the other hand, the very imperfections of any human work, taking their form from the time and place of the writer, from his character and the nature of the subject of which he treats, aid us in determining the extent of his credibility. The strongest argument for the truth of the Gospel narratives is found, as I have endeavoured in the foregoing pages to show, in the marks of human nature, in the traces, every where visible throughout these remarkable histories, of human minds, honest and intelligent, and yet impressed by the institutions, partaking of the opinions and prejudices of a certain period and country, and affected, in various ways, more or less powerfully, by the very facts they narrate. We are not then to be dismayed at the slightest appearance of misstatement in works which we acknowledge to be productions of men. The thing is inevitable. But not only so, the mistakes that appear, produced in part by the very truth of the facts related, not only do not impair, they may confirm our faith, and more powerfully than any direct external evidence.

It is true the errors discoverable in a given work may be so numerous, and of so serious a character, as entirely to destroy its credibility. It is none the less true, none the less to be considered that, as no man is so honest and wise as to be placed beyond the possibility of misapprehension, so some degree of error may consist with sterling integrity of purpose and first rate

powers of observation. An individual may relate to us an event, ordinary or extraordinary, in such terms, in such a manner, with such an air, as to satisfy us perfectly that he must have witnessed it. Such may be his relation, that, upon the closest examination, we may be convinced, beyond the possibility of doubt, that it is founded in reality. He may tell us at the same time of another event, equally remarkable and as confidently believed in by him, of which, however, he neither professes to have, nor, from his own showing, could he possibly have, the same direct personal knowledge as in the former instance. Are we to receive both relations with the same confidence? Or because we hesitate to admit one must our faith in the other waver? Perhaps the very reality of the first fact related has occasioned misapprehension in the other case.

For example. Matthew relates that at the crucifixion of Jesus "many bodies of the saints who slept rose, and after his resurrection, came into the holy city and appeared unto many." I suppose that Matthew believed this statement. And his believing it is a strong reason why it should be considered well and decided upon with care. But my confidence in his integrity and intelligence is not to be questioned because I hesitate to admit it, nor, without a violation of common charity and common sense, can it be inferred that I doubt the truth of the other and more important parts of the narrative. Did I not fully believe the other facts, the works, death and resurrection of Jesus, did I not perceive the numerous and decisive evidences to his competency as an eye-witness, which Matthew has given in the whole structure of his narrative, I should not see the reason that I do for pausing over the passage referred to. As it is, I cannot help observing that Matthew does not say, nor imply, that

either he himself or any of the immediate disciples saw the saints who rose from their graves and came into the city. He simply states what 'many' affirmed. And precisely in proportion to the vividness of our faith in the miraculous career of Jesus, as narrated by Matthew, in the thrilling impression which his extraordinary life and death and the rumour of his resurrection must have made on the public mind, we shall perceive how very natural it was, under the circumstances, that 'many' should see visions and dream dreams, that throughout the city, the scene of the great catastrophe, rumours should be rife of ghosts and apparitions, rumours communicated by one to another with white cheeks and lips and glaring eyes, and that in such an excited state of public feeling, these things should be told as actual facts, unquestionable visitations from the world of spirits. As such they are represented by Matthew. And we may suppose that he believed them without questioning his good sense or his honesty. Let a man of no ordinary soundness of judgment and purity of purpose be placed in Matthew's situation, and witness the things which the Evangelist had seen, and we may easily conceive that he would have been impressed more or less deeply by popular reports, and disposed to give them credit. It does not weaken a rational confidence in Matthew that in this instance he has stated a rumour as a fact. On the contrary, our confidence in the soundness of his judgment may well be increased when we observe how little of fiction is mingled with his narrative, and what abounding internal evidences are presented that the things he relates, are not illusions but realities, not matters of hearsay, credited upon inadequate grounds, but facts, which the writer knew. I am persuaded that he was a man remarkably sound in head and heart, protected against false im-

pressions by a mind of singular truth. Neither he nor his brother historians give us the slightest reason to regret, that wiser and better men were not present to be the witnesses and narrators of those great events. Taking all things into consideration, I am unable to conceive how the work could have been better done.

The aim of these remarks is best shown by instances; and I mention another. In the 12th chapter of the Book of Acts, there is an account of the deliverance of the Apostle Peter from the prison into which he had been thrown by Herod. "Peter therefore was kept in prison; but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. And when Herod would have brought him forth (to put him to death), the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shone in the prison; and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, 'Gird thyself and bind on thy sandals:' and so he did. And he saith unto him, 'Cast thy garments about thee, and follow me.' And he went out and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth into the city; which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him, and when Peter was come to himself, he said, 'Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent his angel and hath delivered me out of the hands of Herod and from all the expectations of the Jews.'"

Now, without casting the slightest suspicion on the

Apostle's head or heart, we may suppose that he misapprehended the circumstances here stated. That he was a man "of an incorrigible and losing honesty," the statement itself shows. He relates that he was 'asleep' when the angel came to him, and that when he was awake, 'he wist not that it was real which was done by the angel, but thought he saw a vision.' And when the angel left him, he speaks of 'coming to himself.' Is it for a moment to be disputed that the testimony of an individual to the things, which he sees in such a state of mind, is to be taken with some abatement? He may be eminently discreet and honest, yet as he is a man he is liable in such a state to misapprehend what passes before him. There are no mortal powers of observation so strong as not to be disturbed, more or less, under such circumstances. We are permitted, nay, we are required, in all truth to suspect a mistake, especially since our knowledge of the state of things intimates with the greatest probability the true account of this incident. Let us look at it more closely.

We have a very imperfect sense of the magnitude of these things which Peter had witnessed, of the singular powers of Him with whom the Apostle had been associated as a friend and disciple, if we overlook the effect which the recent ministry of Jesus must have had on Peter's mind. What an experience had been his! Having witnessed the wonders wrought by his master, having held converse with one whom God had sent and whom the grave had restored, having come himself to be engaged in a great work, a work which enjoyed the special providence of Heaven, could he have possibly avoided being swayed by all that he had seen and felt? Suddenly aroused from sleep in the prison from which he looked to be liberated only by

death, was it not natural that his first and absorbing impression should be, that God had specially interposed for his deliverance, and that the person, who led him out, was an angel from Heaven; and was it not equally natural that every thing that occurred should be coloured by this impression?

And further, do we really believe that the events, recorded in the gospels, actually took place? Do we believe in that miraculous Man of Nazareth, in the instantaneous restoration of the sick, lame, and blind, in the raising of Lazarus, and in the awful death and re-appearance of Jesus himself, and can we conceive that, at such a spectacle, the like of which had never before been exhibited on earth, the minds of all who came within sight and sound thereof, did not stir and quake to their inmost depths? Why, enough had happened to shake the very world out of its place. The whole history of Jesus gives evidence that he wrought on the public mind with unprecedented power. The common people heard him gladly, and thronged around him by thousands, and, but that they were cowering slaves, they would have risen in a mass against the spiritual tyrants who oppressed them, and put him to death. At the time of Peter's imprisonment, there were thousands of Christians in and around Jerusalem. He would not have been thought worthy of Herod's notice, if the cause in which he was engaged, was not making alarming progress. Thousands were praying fervently for his deliverance. It is not to be doubted that there were hundreds, thousands more, secret friends and well-wishers of the Christians, persons imperfectly acquainted with Christianity, neither considered, nor calling themselves, disciples, and yet ready to help the Christians, or at least, to connive at their success. Secret favourers of the cause, it is natural to suppose,

were to be found every where, even among the ministers of the law, and official servants of the government. These things being so, and we must shut our eyes to all history and observation, and to all we know of human nature to suppose otherwise, is it not highly probable that the Apostle was liberated by a plan concerted by persons who were either unknown to him and his immediate friends, or were anxious for their own safety to keep themselves concealed, and who, through some address, had obtained the means of entering the prison? The two chains by which he was bound to the two guards sleeping beside him, and which to the wondering, half-awake Apostle seemed to fall from him, were probably unfastened softly before he awoke, that the guards might not be aroused. The gate, that appeared to open of itself, was opened by a human, though an unseen, hand. It is easy to conceive how such a plot may have been laid and executed. And if it were, nothing is more natural than that it should have appeared to Peter precisely as it did. Had he viewed it otherwise, it would have argued a lack of sensibility in him, and shown that his mind had not been impressed by the exciting experience of the few years previous, as it must have been, were that mind human, and that experience, real. I cannot imagine how an honest, devout man, a witness of the life of Jesus, a prisoner expecting death, and a Jew, in the bewilderment in which he declares himself to have been, could have avoided the misapprehension into which he fell.

This account of the mode of Peter's escape from prison, may or may not be the true account. But he who objects to it that it affects the authority of Christianity, knows not the impregnable foundations upon

which our religion, as an historical fact, rests. The above account presupposes the substantial truth of the history of Christ. It is the reality of all that preceded the imprisonment of Peter that makes this view of the case probable.

These observations are wholly misapprehended if they are thought to imply, or to have a tendency to produce, a distrust of the historical truth of the gospels. The ground here taken is plainly this: supposing these narratives to be true, the best histories ever written, still, as they are the compositions of men, they cannot be devoid of error. We must make up our minds to find mistakes here as in every human work. A book may contain many errors, and yet, all circumstances considered, make pretensions to no ordinary degree of accuracy. No charge of error brought against the Gospels alarms me. If it be sweeping and unqualified, if it be said that they are full of errors, that the main facts are wholly misstated, I deny it utterly, and demand proof without fear. I know better. I see that the whole texture of these books was woven in the loom of Truth. But if it be meant only that there are errors with regard to a few subordinate particulars, the answer is, some degree of error was to be expected, especially when we consider to what untried and powerful influences the minds of their authors were exposed. It could not be otherwise. Calmly and fearlessly then, nay, with confidence and hope let us examine the probable errors, and see to what they amount. I venture to assert that in every case as in the two instances I have adduced, it will be found that the error was occasioned by the stirring truth of the principal facts recorded; that whenever the writers have misapprehended certain particulars, it was because they had

been eye-witnesses of the life of Jesus, participants in its wonderful scenes.

The foregoing remarks have a direct bearing upon our inquiries into the circumstances of the birth of Christ. The History informs us that he was conceived in a miraculous manner, that an angel appeared to his mother, a virgin, and announced his birth, and that he was accordingly born without a human father, the offspring of the Holy Spirit of God.*

Now there is an improbability of the truth of this account, arising from its very unusual and extraordinary character, which, however, is not decisive. We cannot conclude upon this ground alone that the account is false. It justifies us in demanding very powerful evidence, but no more. We are not at liberty to reject the story altogether. If the fact proposed, however strange, is not an absurdity, a contradiction in terms, a nonentity, it may admit of proof, although it might require the very strongest. Whatever is possible is *probable*. I use this word, not in its most common sense as implying an actual and admitted preponderance of evidence, but, in a stricter sense, as equivalent to 'capable of proof.' And with this use of the term, I say again, whatever is possible is probable, because we live, and move, and have our being, in the midst of a Power of inexhaustible resources and ceaseless activity. Thus situated, seeing what we see, it is natural and right for us to expect new manifestations

* It is well known that the genuineness of the passage in Matthew from which the above account is derived, has been, and is disputed. But the principal objections to it rest upon internal considerations, and will of course lose their weight, if it should appear that its internal character has not been rightly apprehended. See Norton on the Genuineness of the Gospels, additional notes, p. liii.

of power, transcending all our experience. 'But then,' it will be said, 'men are so apt to be deluded; to mistake the fictions of their own imagination for miracles, that we must be cautious.' Yes, we must be cautious, very. But to decide against a reported fact off-hand, only because it is unprecedented, is not caution, but pure rashness. Why are men so prone to delusion, so ready to believe, so apt to mistake fiction for fact? Because they know themselves to be environed with things new and strange, mysteries above and below, around and within, and the wonderfulness of an event is with them no reason for doubting it, even if it be not a positive reason for admitting it. The excesses of superstition are numerous and deplorable. Still in a condition like man's, teeming with awful and ever-varying displays of Power, there is not only more of nature, but more of reason, of wisdom, in faith than in skepticism.* The very readiness of mankind to mistake the marvels of their own creation for facts shows that wonders actually abound, that the marvellous is in the course of nature. At the same time, it admonishes us to use care. Be it then borne in mind, that the strangeness of the account of the birth of Christ is a reason why we should demand evidence and weigh it cautiously, but it is not a reason for rejecting it at once.

There is an improbability in this account, resulting from another and more specific cause. It arises from

* The respective evils of superstition and skepticism do not admit of being compared. The latter is so much more injurious than the former, that nature herself has provided against it. Unbelief never has prevailed extensively, nor for any long period. Mankind can better exist with the grossest excesses of faith, than without any faith at all. It is a remark of Hume's, that if a nation can be found without any idea of a God, it must be nearly on a level with the brutes.

the common disposition of the world to magnify the circumstances of the birth and childhood of distinguished men, to believe that, upon their first coming on the stage of life, supernatural appearances were visible, unearthly agents busy, that

“ — at their nativity,
The front of heaven was full of fiery shapes,
Of burning cressets; and at their birth,
The frame and huge foundation of the earth
Shak'd like a coward.”

Alexander would have had it believed that he was the son of Jupiter, and Pythagoras was reported to be the child of Apollo.

Now admitting the reality of all that is related of the public ministry of Jesus, of his powerful teaching, his miracles, death, and rising from the dead, is it not very natural that wonderful stories should be told of his birth and early years? And, aware of the disposition to magnify the birth of great men, can we help thinking that the accounts of the nativity of Christ should be received with some hesitation? These accounts may prove true to the letter; and it may be that the universality of the disposition to exaggerate the origin of extraordinary persons, is owing in part to the fact that their birth is generally attended by striking circumstances; and if so, then the existence of this disposition may afford some presumption of the truth of this account. At the same time, knowing how eager men are to find or create something marvellous in the origin of those by whose greatness they have been moved, we are certainly to examine the relations of the birth of Christ with great care.

Should this consideration so far weigh with us as to lead us to reject the notices of his birth as wholly fabulous, or to regard them as too imperfect to command

our assent, still our faith in his public acts and official career could not by any possibility be endangered. It would be strengthened. Not the slightest doubt of the actual existence of Alexander and Pythagoras is produced by those fables concerning their parentage to which I have alluded. On the contrary, we are convinced that they must have lived, and lived no common lives, or such extravagant stories would never have been told. So pronounce the account of the birth of Jesus a fable, only the more direct and inevitable is the inference, not only that he had an existence, but that he must have lived and spoken and wrought with power. If a fable, whence had this story its origin? How came it ever to be thought likely? The character of Jesus, the facts concerning him which were well known and indisputable, must have given it its air of probability. No room is afforded for any inference unfavourable to the truth of the other portions of his history, which record his public acts and ministry. On the contrary, their truth is directly confirmed, and a strong presumption is created that these must be true, or such a story of his birth never would have had an existence.

In this connexion I would remark in passing, that the doctrine of the Supreme Divinity of Jesus Christ, which has taken so large and strong a hold upon men's minds, is an attestation to the indescribable power of his life. If he had been 'a mere man'—if he had not done such things as man had never done before, and spoken as never man spake, how would it have been possible for men, in the very face of the records, to suppose that he was a superhuman, superangelic being. There must have been a divinity without measure in his life as it was spent on earth, or the opinions of his nature, that have so long and widely prevailed, never would have arisen.

As the way of viewing the subject now suggested does not affect the divine authority of our Lord's public character, the reality of his miraculous ministry, neither does it diminish the trustworthiness of the Evangelists. That they believed the account given of the birth of Christ is a fact that should weigh with us. We are not lightly to regard the authority of men so single-hearted, and of such good sense withal. But it is showing them no disrespect to consider that they were still men, and men whose minds were exposed to disturbing influences, such as we can scarcely form an idea of. They could not have had, nor do they profess to have had, the same personal knowledge of the circumstances of their Master's birth that they possessed of his public life, his miracles, death and resurrection. His nativity comes first in the order of time in their narratives; but it was the last thing about which they were likely to be interested in obtaining information. It was not until after they had come to believe in him as the Christ, and they had witnessed his works and listened to his living words, that they turned their attention to the circumstances of his birth. Had they had direct knowledge of these before, and given them full credit, they must have been believers in Jesus long before they became his personal followers. But it was not until years after his birth, and some time after they had waited on his public teaching, that they were brought to acknowledge his divine authority. Then, when they owned him as the long-expected and heaven-sent, and he had risen to a height in their estimation far above all other men, and they regarded him with the profoundest awe, as man never was regarded before, then, in looking back, they may have felt some curiosity about his early life and his nativity. However wise and true, they surely were not prepared to

question and sift the accounts they received of that distant period. It is unreasonable to suppose, that, after what they had seen and heard, with the overflowing reverence and faith produced by personal intercourse with Jesus, they were cautious and critical in obtaining information respecting his early circumstances. They must have been disposed to receive whatever was told them, if it were not obviously, glaringly inconsistent with what they already knew. They had themselves witnessed the greatest miracles. They had seen blind men restored to sight, the sick healed, and the dead raised by the word of Jesus; and with the deep impression of these wonders fresh in their hearts, it would have been unnatural, had they been slow to believe what might be related of the origin of their Master. In this way minds of remarkable soundness and truth may have received a bias. An individual may be disposed to receive certain things upon hearsay, without careful examination, and yet his personal testimony to such events as make up the manhood of Jesus, may be so clear and satisfactory as to allow no room for doubt. Because his mind is biased with respect to one fact, it does not follow that he is disqualified to testify to other facts, and especially to those facts which occasioned the bias. The bias itself is the most decisive evidence of their reality.

My object is, not to prove the history of the birth of Christ to be false, but to show, supposing it to be fabulous, conceding all that an opponent of Christianity may assert in regard to it, viz : that it is one of those fables so often circulated about the origin of great men, that this supposition affects neither the divine authority of Christ, nor the competency of his biographers. It does not diminish but strengthen our faith in both. The account of the birth of Christ may be

rejected, and yet the Evangelists continue men of a rare truthfulness, and he remains the divinely-taught Teacher, a Doer of miracles, an Utterer of prophecies, the Inspired and Anointed, the Crucified and the Risen. Nay, for all that this rejection proves, he may be what the prevalent faith of Christians represent him, a divine being, a person of the Godhead. To say that a disbelief of his miraculous conception is equivalent to a denial of the divinity of his mission, or even of his nature, is to imply that his words and works, the events of his manhood, furnish no sufficient evidence to the divinity of his office or his person. It is giving an altogether undue weight to a portion of his life, to which neither he nor his apostles ever appealed as evidence of the justice of his claims.

Another thing to be considered when we take up the subject of the nativity of Jesus is this. His life naturally divides itself into two parts, one extending from his birth to his baptism, a period of about thirty years, the other embracing the comparatively brief duration of his public life, from his baptism to his final disappearance shortly after his resurrection, a period of not more than three years, perhaps but a little more than one year.

Now of these two periods, the latter is so far superior in importance to the former, that it may be considered as the only important one. Turn to the New Testament, and you find that two of the Evangelists, Mark and John, have not recorded a word about the birth and early circumstances of Jesus. If any one of the four had knowledge of his nativity, it was John. But whatever he knew or believed, he has not thought it of sufficient importance to be recorded. And how small a portion of the other two Gospels, Matthew's and

Luke's, is occupied with notices of our Saviour's birth!

It is plain also on the very face of these records, and from the very nature of the case, that it was not until his public career had commenced that the disciples were drawn to him. The persons, from whom our accounts of him are derived, became his personal adherents after he had presented himself to the world in a public character. From their own showing, their direct knowledge of him did not fairly begin until about the time of his baptism or shortly after, when thirty years of his life had elapsed. From that period to the termination of his course their knowledge of him was direct and personal. Their histories are confined almost entirely to these few last, crowded years, or months, and there are no marks or signs of truth which these narratives do not bear. All that they knew of their master before they became his intimate and professed followers, was derived from indirect sources, and all that they have told us of that previous period has the character of such an origin.

I have said that it was not until after they had become personally attached to him, and acknowledged him as the Messiah, sent from God, that their curiosity was awakened concerning his birth and early years. But it may be questioned whether, even then, they had the time or the inclination to think of any thing else but those great and stirring scenes in which they had been personally concerned. They were wholly taken up with these and with the active labours to which they were devoted, as the witnesses and publishers of by far the most important part of his life. For the indulgence of a speculative curiosity they had neither leisure nor disposition. What they had themselves witnessed was transcendently interesting, and they

listened probably with comparative indifference, if not with ill-disguised impatience, to what others might have to tell of other and less important matters. Could we only enter into the state of their minds, and understand the effect which their intercourse with Jesus must have had, we shall see at once how little disposed they must have been to entertain curious questions about his birth, or to investigate the circumstances of his childhood with any considerable care. What was generally reported and believed of his nativity, they probably assented to with comparatively little thought and feeling; their whole souls being occupied with what they themselves knew, events, which, as with a blaze of light, vindicated the greatness of their master, and were enough, and more than enough for them. Accordingly, in their records of his life, they have given little or no attention to the circumstances of his birth and childhood. They omit them altogether, or notice them very slightly, and pass on to those events of which they had personal knowledge, and which of course were chiefly interesting to them; and when they come to these, their narrations show the most affecting marks of being the work of men who knew what they relate, who had seen with their own eyes and heard with their own ears.

Such being the state of the case, although the account of the birth of Christ comes first in the order of time, the proper method of inquiry is to begin with the history of his public life. Having established the truth of this, then we occupy the true point of view, whence to estimate correctly the history of the nativity. Then, when the great facts of his public career have become real to us, when we perceive what an impressive and all-engrossing influence they must have had upon the immediate spectators, we shall see the reason why so

little is related by the Evangelists of his early years, and why that little is, in all likelihood, only the record of the current belief of the time. There is no serious and intelligent reader of the New Testament, who has not at times wondered and regretted that so little is told of the early and private life of Christ. But if the tenor of the foregoing paragraph is correct, an interesting and satisfactory reason appears, why the personal witnesses of his public course should have said little or nothing of his previous history. Their minds were taken up and filled with the great things they had themselves beheld. The extraordinary events in which they had participated engrossed their feelings to the exclusion of other and less important matters. They would have told us more of his birth and youth, had they not seen what they had seen. Their silence about that portion of his history is scarcely to be regretted, since it is so expressive of the reality of the facts which they narrate. It is traceable to a state of mind naturally produced by their experience.

Were our faith in the truth of their statements one half as strong as theirs, we should immediately see why they have paid so little attention to the early life of their Master. That portion of his life may seem important to us, whose faith is so feeble and requires every support. But it could not have appeared so to those, whose faith, produced by the actual sight of the divine scenes of his ministry, was overflowing and all-engrossing. Our curiosity in his early and private circumstances may not be lessened with the increase of our faith, because our faith necessarily grows slowly, and, of course, leaves us time and disposition to attend to things comparatively unimportant. But could a full conviction of the truth of all that is told us of the public life of Jesus be as directly borne into our minds,

as it was into theirs, who have given these relations, it would act upon us with instantaneous and indescribable force, and we should start up and pour ourselves out in the glorious labour of proclaiming the kingdom of God. As it is, our faith in the great facts of the life of Jesus is, it may be hoped, sufficiently strong to enable us to perceive the comparative unimportance of the early and private period of the life of Jesus, and to appreciate the great probability that the Evangelists took no particular pains to obtain precise information of his nativity, and that the accounts which are extant, such as they are, were such as were commonly received at the time.

When we proceed to examine these accounts, we are struck with the traces which they bear of Jewish and Heathen notions.

Matthew's narrative of the birth of Jesus is remarkable for the quotations which it contains from the Old Testament. The Jews regarded their Scriptures with superstitious veneration, and were wont to quote them in a very peculiar manner. To their study and exposition the labours and lives of the learned were devoted. These writings constituted nearly the whole of their literature. The very letters of the Sacred Book were counted, and studied as a series of mystical symbols. Every text was supposed to have a multitude of meanings; and if, by any ingenuity, a passage of Scripture could be applied to a passing event, the occurrence so described was considered as a fulfilment of a Scriptural prophecy. An able and interesting account of the manner in which the Jews regarded and used their sacred books may be found in Mr. Everett's Defence of Christianity, to which the reader

is referred. It will suffice to remark here that the instances of the Jewish fashion of quoting the Scriptures, which occur in the first chapters of Matthew are peculiarly striking; as, for example, when the sojourn of Joseph and Mary with the young child in Egypt is mentioned, it is said, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 'Out of Egypt have I called my son.'" The passage from the Old Testament, here adduced, obviously has no reference in its original connection to the Messiah, but refers to the Israelitish nation called out of Egyptian bondage.

It must be recollected that the great body of the first Christians were Jews, and that their conversion to the Christian faith did not imply their complete emancipation from Jewish modes of thinking. They believed in Jesus of Nazareth because they regarded him as fulfilling the divine promise to their nation. And they were naturally and strongly disposed to discover and magnify every possible correspondence between him and the declarations of their sacred books. That Jewish conceptions, then, may have had a strong influence in giving to the accounts of the nativity their present form and fashion, is by no means improbable. The actual truth, without any wilful misrepresentation, may have come to be materially distorted by Jewish modes of thought, although we may not be able to trace and measure their influence with any precision.

The account of the visit of the wise men, found in Matthew, bears strong marks of a Heathen origin. The word, translated 'wise men,' ΜΑΓΟΙ (*Magi*), is of Persian extraction. It denotes an order of men who flourished throughout the East, but in Persia particularly, where the worship of fire prevailed. They were

devoted, among other things, to medicine and astrology; and, in accordance with the generally received idea of a connection between human interests and the stars, were accustomed to consult the heavens and to predict from the aspect of the heavenly bodies national revolutions, the advent or death of extraordinary men; and their predictions were received with faith and awe, oftentimes no doubt, by their effects on men's minds, working out their own fulfilment. That there were individuals of great depth of learning and insight among the magi is hardly to be questioned. And yet as a class they were deluded, we may suppose, by the fictions of their own imagination, and by 'science falsely so called.' That a special revelation of the birth of Christ should be made to these men by means of the superstitious art of astrology is incredible. And it would be ascribing quite an undue efficacy to magic and the art just named to suppose that, through these means, the wise men were enabled to discover the Saviour of the world, the heaven-sent Deliverer, in the child of Mary. But it is very natural that the general reverence with which they were regarded should attribute to them a prophetic knowledge of the birth of the Messiah, or even that they themselves, taking a hint from the popular feeling, should have announced the appearance of a new star in the Heavens, the sign of a new and extraordinary man. We know upon the united testimony of Josephus, Suetonius and Tacitus, that about the time of the birth of Christ, an expectation of the appearance of an extraordinary personage existed not only in Judea but throughout the East. This popular hope may have produced the prophecy of the magi. And as Judea was the country in which this expectation was most confidently entertained, the wise men may also have announced that the star which they

had discovered, hung over that land,—pointed to that spot. If they went no farther than to make this general annunciation, it is easy to see how, in the course of time, thirty or forty years after the birth of Jesus, when the world had witnessed his wonderful life, this prophecy of the magi should have been exaggerated into such a story as we find in Matthew, and that it should come to be understood not only that the magi had discovered the star of Jesus, but had sought him in obedience to its guidance—had seen him as well as his star.

It is not improbable that Herod, stained with the blood of his children and kindred, alarmed for the security of his throne by the popular expectation of a Deliverer and Prince, and driven by the consciousness of guilt to superstitious acts, consulted certain of the magi. There may have been some communication between them and him, out of which arose in part the story of his having employed them to discover the child to whom the popular hope pointed, and whose birth he had so much reason to dread.

The Jews, we know, expected “a sign,” some luminous display of power to designate the Messiah whenever he should appear. This expectation would naturally dispose those inclined to Jewish ways of thinking, to give easy credence to such a narration as is extant in the gospel of Matthew. It confirmed and gratified their demand for a sign.

Another feature of the notices of the birth of Jesus, is the interspersion of poetical compositions—hymns, in Luke's account. Such is obviously the character of the beautiful sentences represented as uttered by Mary when hailed by her cousin Elizabeth as the mother of the Messiah, beginning with—

*My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
For he hath regarded the low estate of his hand-
maiden: for, behold, from henceforth all genera-
tions shall call me blessed, &c. (i. 46 to 55, incl.)*

In the same chapter, (67—80) Zacharias, the father of the Baptist, is described as breaking forth in a similar manner, in a psalm, borrowed, in reference to its phraseology, from the devotional poetry of the Jewish Scriptures. These passages give a mixed, poetico-historical character, to this portion of the New Testament. And it takes in part the air of a devotional effusion. And thus regarded, it is finely in keeping with the truth of the subsequent history, and the probable state of the historian's mind. The case may be stated thus:

When the Evangelist set himself to record in order these great events of the ~~future~~ ^{life} and public life of Jesus, of which, from his opportunities, he had perfect knowledge, he found in circulation certain compositions, relating to the period of the birth of Jesus, embodying certain incidents concerning the mother of our Lord and others of his relatives, which incidents were probably founded upon some vague traditional information. These publications were not, and did not profess to be, accurate narratives, but compositions of a devotional cast, modified in part by the very faith and reverence which the wondrous life and ministry of Jesus had produced. It was perfectly natural that the Evangelist should have made a selection from these records and connected them together as a fit introduction or prelude to his history. Feeling that he had enough to relate about Jesus which none could question, it was not likely that he would stop to sift these early accounts. He saw that their spirit and effect were good. They were consistent with his own feelings; and, with such

m

an amount on hand of indisputable truth to relate, he could afford to adopt these compositions for the sake of their spirit, without regard to the precise degree of truth they might contain. This trait of Luke's narrative of the nativity, its poetical, devotional character, so far from lessening his credibility as an historian of the public life of Jesus, tends indirectly to increase it. For such compositions respecting the birth of Christ owed their origin and the place they obtained in the record of the Evangelist to a state of feeling, to those sentiments of reverence and enthusiasm towards Jesus and all that concerned him, which could hardly have had an existence, had not the public and known acts of his life been of a kind to produce them.

It cannot fail to arrest attention that the accounts of the nativity abound in notices of Dreams and Visions. "The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph *in a dream*," warning him not to put away Mary, "for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." It was, as the history explicitly states, while he *slept* that he received this communication. The wise men were warned of God *in a dream*, "that they should not return to Herod." Again Joseph went into Egypt with the young child and his mother, "the angel of the Lord appearing to him *in a dream*." In the same way he was directed to return into the land of Israel after the death of Herod, *in a dream*. So also Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, saw *a vision* of the angel of the Lord in the temple who announced the birth of John. Once more, the angel Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary, declaring to her that she should be the Mother of the Messiah.

Now if I venture the remark that this multiplicity of dreams reveals the character and claims of these rela-

tions, it is because I am emboldened thereto by the knowledge which the gospels have given us, in the public life of Jesus, of true, genuine, God-ordained miracles. The works which he did are strange and unprecedented, lying far beyond the boundaries of human experience. Still they are broad noon-day facts, standing in the eye of the sun and the world, and invested, by his manner and the circumstances in which they occurred, with a moral light, commending them intuitively to our full convictions. With these divine models before us, we may be qualified to decide upon all other miracles; and we cannot help thinking that dreams prefer but a doubtful claim to be ranked with those great facts.

The laws by which dreams are produced are wrapt in darkness. That the visions of sleep are for the most part traceable to foregone states of mind, none will dispute. Yet it may be that the constitution of our nature is such as to allow of direct communications in dreams from the Father of spirits and the world of spirits. In all times dreams have been a startling mystery; and they have discharged high offices in the various courses of providence, by the impressions they have made, the energy they have inspired or repressed, changing the whole order of affairs. If they have sprung out of the mind, they have wrought upon it in return; and we cannot but account them among the veiled ministrants of the Invisible, obeying his word.

That Mary and Joseph and Zacharias should have had remarkable dreams or visions, making powerful impressions on their devout minds, is altogether probable. Consider what a time it was, and how the human mind was heaving in mysterious anticipation of a coming angel from Heaven in the shape of a man. The birth of a consecrated One, the anointed of God, was

the glad tidings which all were breathless to hear. Did not many a mother's heart beat quick and swell high at the thought that she might be the chosen one, the Mother of mothers, blessed to the last generation? If not a word about the mother of Jesus were to be found in the Christian Records, we should infer from the character of her son that she was no ordinary woman—that she must have been possessed of a holy sensibility, of a high religious character. Jewish wives deemed it a sore affliction to be childless. Consequently the prospect of becoming mothers was hailed by them with a sacred joy. There was every thing in the sentiments of the time and country, and in the probable character of the mother of Jesus, to exalt her imagination; and, in view of her approaching marriage, to cause her to dwell upon the idea of the Messiah, until the thought wove itself into her nightly visions, and she dreamed that she was the destined mother of that divine personage, and even that she had conceived before her espousals. That a woman of the devout old Hebrew lineage, related to the priesthood, of the loftiest religious character, betrothed, and to an individual who traced his descent to that illustrious line of David which was expected to produce the Messiah, and at a period when the whole nation was waiting eagerly for the birth of the heaven-sent deliverer, should have been visited with vivid dreams—that she should have a vision of an angel hailing her as the favoured mother of the Messiah, and even that she should dream that she already bore that Holy One within her—all this is very natural; and, so far from breathing a breath against the virgin purity of her spirit, such a dream we may regard as a touching indication of a spotless mind, of that “saintly chastity, so dear to heaven,”

"That when a soul is found sincerely so,
A thousand liveried angels lackey her,
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,
And in clear dream and solemn vision,
Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear."

The influence of the mother upon her child before it has seen the light will not be questioned. If her frame is often agitated by violent emotions, heating the current of her blood and unstringing the nerves, the delicate organization of her child must be disturbed in the still process of formation. On the other hand, the maternal mind, inhaling ever the serene air of religious thought, daily exalted by holy aspirations, and visited nightly by the celestial visions of a tender and innocent imagination, must exercise an informing power upon the babe which she bears,

"In the deare closet of her painefull side."

We know not the mode nor the extent of the influence. It is a divine mystery. Still we must believe that the angel-thoughts and dreams of the blessed Mother of our Lord must have ministered, a part of the grand discipline whereby he was prepared and sanctified, even in her sacred womb, to be the Son of God and Redeemer of man.

The sum of the foregoing observations is simply this. When that extraordinary succession of events which begun with the thirtieth year of the life of Christ was terminated, there naturally arose a desire for information concerning the birth and early circumstances of the Wonderful Man of Nazareth, and certain incidents pertaining to that period, certain remarkable experiences of his mother and others connected with him, came to be published abroad. Viewed through the magnifying medium of the faith, veneration, and enthu-

siasm, which the remarkable life that was just closed had produced, they were shaped and exaggerated thereby. In a little while they assumed a written form, and were, without doubt, among those many fragmentary accounts, more or less imperfect, of the life of Jesus, of the existence of which Luke informs us in the commencement of his Gospel. When the Evangelists undertook their histories, they selected from the generally received relations concerning the nativity, such as appeared to them, consistently with all that they knew and felt, to be nearest to the truth. They entered into no laborious investigation of the truth of these accounts, oral or written, pertaining to the birth of Jesus, because they were comparatively of little moment, and the minds of the historians were principally bent upon relating what they themselves knew, and what was of the greatest value and importance.

I have thus hinted at what appears to me to have been the most probable state of the case. The supposition of a natural and common degree of exaggeration, the consequence of the miraculous career of Jesus, accounts without violence for the difference between the representations given in the records, and the view which I have suggested of this portion of the history. I have said nothing inconsistent with the belief that his birth was miraculous. Nor am I prepared to say that he was not created in an extraordinary way. That he was inspired and endowed as no other man ever was, his words and works bear witness. He stands at so unapproachable a height above the rest of the children of men, that, supposing not a word were extant respecting his birth, one could scarcely help feeling that there must have been something very peculiar in the mode of his introduction into the world.

His life and death and resurrection speak the divinity of his mission. And were there any evidence of the divinity of his person, it would be furnished rather by his public life than by the history of his birth. Neither the authority which he claimed as the Son of God, nor the doctrine of his supreme divinity, is affected by the foregoing views.

In these remarks upon the history of the Nativity, I have not professed to say precisely where the fact ends and the exaggeration begins, to separate from the tissue of the narrative the filaments of truth. I have sought only to set forth certain considerations of indispensable importance to a right approach to this interesting portion of the history. They may not assist us to form a distinct picture of the Nativity, but may tend only to make us feel that this part of the record is imperfect, more or less a misstatement of the truth. Still, so far from weakening our faith in the divine authority of Christ, the reality of the subsequent events of his life, they tend incidentally, and, therefore, all the more powerfully, to its confirmation. The views now suggested have force only as his public ministry, the history of his manhood and of the close of his career, is felt to be true. It is the clear light, which this, confessedly the important period, pours forth, that casts all that goes before it in the shade. If the account of his origin is unsatisfactory, it is because the narrative of what afterwards occurred, when he appeared renovating the world, is so lucid and decisive, so copiously marked with the signatures of reality.

Finally, admitting the notices of his birth upon this view of the case to be distorted and exaggerated statements, in which it is hardly possible to ascertain the exact amount of truth, it does not follow that they lose all value and interest. On the contrary, they are in-

teresting because, all circumstances considered, they are precisely of the character we should expect. It was not for men before whose eyes, the impressive scenes of the manhood of Jesus had passed, to revert to the origin of this wonderful being with minds curious, critical and unbiassed. Accordingly, upon all the known principles of our nature, we should look for accounts like these. It is an impressive fact that, while the wonders of the life of Jesus stand out in broad day, dreams and visions preceded his advent, and dreams and visions followed his final disappearance, like clouds heralding the approach and following the departure of a great luminary. When all minds were filled with the exciting expectation of a heaven-sent Prophet and Prince, how natural was it that dreams of a startling and exalting character should be rumoured! And equally natural was it, after the wondrous spectacle had passed by, that such visions should occur as are found in the book of Acts. The state of feeling immediately preceding and following the appearance of him, whose coming was as with wind and fire from Heaven, attests the reality of his power and illustrates the mysteries of man's nature. The opening and the close of the New Testament history wonderfully accord with the truth of the great central facts. In the first we see the agitation of an extraordinary hope; in the last, of an unprecedented experience.

CHAPTER II.

THE BAPTIST.

"— to his great baptism flocked,
With awe the regions round."—*Milton*.

ABOUT thirty years of the life of Jesus had passed away, when he appeared on the banks of the Jordan, there, by a solemn baptism, to express his high resolves and commence that divine career which was the fulfilment, the complete manifestation of righteousness. The notices we have of him before that period are, as we have seen, brief and imperfect. Where was he, and how was he employed during those thirty unknown years? I presume not to form the faintest conjecture concerning the childhood and youth, to which so wondrous a manhood succeeded.

One thought, however, occurs. Although so large a portion of his life was spent in retirement, yet, when he did publicly appear, as he manifested a divine force of character, we cannot suppose the long period of his seclusion to have elapsed without powerful influences on the souls of men. No loftier angel from heaven ever alighted on our earth; and he could not have sojournd so long in the abodes of men, however obscure, without becoming "a creative centre" of life. His unsurpassed knowledge of all that is deepest in man was, in great part intuitive, the light of God in his being, the Holy Spirit. Still his whole style of thinking and expression shows that he had been no unconcerned

observer of Nature and Man. His illustrations were uniformly drawn from the most familiar sources. From the common earth on which he stood, what wells of truth did he cause to gush forth!

There is one passage upon which I would dwell for a moment, partly for its beauty, but principally because it shows that the Man of Nazareth cast no vacant glances around him—that there was no point, however lowly, in the vast spectacle of life, that did not attract his regards.

“To what,” said he on a certain occasion, “shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-place, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, we have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came, neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He hath an evil spirit.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners;’ but wisdom is justified of her children.”

The children of those days, children-like, were wont in their plays to imitate the usages of their elders, and ‘make believe’

“A wedding or a festival,
A mourning or a funeral.”

Nuptial occasions were celebrated with minstrelsy and dancing and gay processions. While at funerals it was the custom to employ certain women, whose business it was to attend at those seasons, and by a cunning imitation of all the outward signs of sorrow, such as beating the breast, and mournful cries, to produce sadness and tears in all beholders. The groups of children, imitating these customs in their plays in the market-places, had not escaped the eye of Jesus. He

had looked upon the little imitators, and seen resemblances deeper than those which met the common observer. How naturally is the thought he expresses incorporated with these familiar circumstances and illustrated by them! What significance do they give to his meaning, which is, in effect, as if he had said, "There is nothing that will suit the men of this generation. Like wayward children, refusing to accede to the proposals of their playfellows, unwilling to play either a funeral or a wedding, they will listen neither to John nor to me. John came, austere, joining in no festivities, and immediately the cry is, "He is mad. He hath an evil spirit." I have come mingling with the world in its common walks and ways, and they denounce me as one given to wine and pleasure. Neither the mournful nor the joyous will please them. But the wisdom that was in John and my wisdom, the children of wisdom (i. e. the wise) will discern and justify."

But this is only one out of the many instances, of which the Gospels are full, that show how Jesus had lived among the scenes and interests of human life, seeing all and feeling for all. And, however retired his habits, we are persuaded that he must have mingled to some extent with men. If so, then the impressions of his own peerless spirit were made upon those with whom he associated. He must have been seen and felt to be no common person. We are told by Luke, and the account lacks no mark of correspondence with what we elsewhere learn of Jesus, that, when only twelve years old, he went to Jerusalem with his parents in observance of one of the national festivals, and attracted the notice, and excited the wonder, of the teachers of the law and others about the Temple, by the intelligence of his questions and replies. We read that on that occasion, his parents set out upon their

return home without him, presuming that he was with some of the numerous company with whom they travelled, and feeling no anxiety on his account, until the second day of his disappearance; a striking proof of the confidence which, at that early age, he had inspired in his natural protectors. They returned to the city in search of him, and, upon visiting the Temple, found the extraordinary child surrounded there by the Scribes and learned men, and when they reproached him for the anxiety his absence had awakened, he replied, "know ye not that I must be about my Father's work?" words which show how early the consciousness of his destiny awoke in his bosom, while the place in which they found him, and the manner in which he was engaged, also show that he could not live among men without a marked and powerful influence. But, except this little incident, we have no direct evidence of the impression he must have made. We are naturally prompted to look for indirect traces of his existence in that hidden time. So few are they, that we conclude that the first thirty years of his life were spent in close, although not absolute, retirement.

The sudden appearance of John the Baptist may be regarded as an indirect attestation, not merely to the existence, but to the moral power of Jesus, previously to the period when he came forth publicly to lift up a world bowed down by ignorance and sin. That strange vision in the wilderness, that human form, clad in camel's hair, that voice, crying, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord"—these were, in part, an indirect, unconcerted, embodiment of the irrepressible power which Jesus shortly afterwards put forth in diviner and more decisive ways. The fervid heart of the son of Zacharias caught a portion of its fire from his divine Kinsman.

The prophetic cry, ringing in the desert, incidentally inspired by Jesus, was the first outburst, heralding the overflowing fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him. Had he had no existence in this world, no participation in its scenes, no association with its dwellers, before he appeared on the banks of the Jordan, then the Sun of Righteousness would have blazed forth suddenly, startling the darkness. But for thirty years that light was gradually rising, and although hidden from the public gaze by the obscurity of a low condition, though it shot forth no direct, far reaching, beams, still some rays must have broken from it, and been reflected from other hearts. The appearance of John corroborates this suggestion. His brief but stirring career was the gray dawn, the lighting up, that preceded the full-orbed glory of the man of Nazareth.

Not that John acted by the command of Jesus, not that there was any concert between them, any understanding, that diminishes, or does not increase rather, our conviction that the Baptist spake from a divine impulse, as he was moved by the Holy Spirit, but my meaning is that his intercourse with Jesus had wrought upon his susceptible mind with great power, refining and quickening. Could I only convey to the reader any just idea of the circumstances in which the childhood and youth of these two were passed! All I can say will fall far short of the reality; still let me attempt to express my own impressions.

Jesus and John were both Hebrews, both of direct Israelitish descent.

What a world of reflections does this one fact suggest! When we speak of the Jewish people, we speak of a people^t altogether the most extraordinary on the face of the globe. I am not going to discuss the claims

of the religion of Moses. It bears the visible impress of divinity. But in order to comprehend with some distinctness the state of things, into which Jesus and his Precursor were ushered at their birth, and the influences, under which their early years were spent, let us look at this great nation for a moment from the lowest point of view, in the simple light of History.

Considered then in the simple light of undisputed history, the Hebrews are the most singular of the nations. And their singularity consists in the elevation and force of their religious sentiment. Of all the races of men, they are pre-eminently the religious race. To substantiate this assertion, the appeal is not made to their ancient history, contained in their sacred books, but to their more modern fortunes. There is an identity of nations as of individuals; and whatever this people have shown themselves to be since the days of Christ and of John, they were the same in their prominent traits then. Two things, their present condition, and their relation to the rest of the world, show most impressively that the Hebrew temperament has ever been a religious temperament, that the Jews have been the sacred, priestly race. Not that the religious principle has always acted beneficently upon their characters, not that they have not sunk repeatedly into great moral degradation, but that the Hebrew mind has evinced the strongest affinity for religion, for spiritual ideas and the deepest religious convictions, this I say.

What a phenomenon does this people present! Upon every considerable spot on the face of the earth, we find the scattered branches of the stock of Abraham. Every where persecuted, the objects of contempt and prejudice, either pursued with menaces or allured by bribes, every where under the most urgent pressure to

repay the injustice of opinion by overreaching and fraud, still every where exhibiting an unfaltering religious loyalty, neither betraying their faith, nor dishonouring it by a spirit of proselytism. Without a particle of national power, or a solitary civil institution, the Jewish nation survives and numbers its thousands and tens of thousands. Other nations far more extensive in territory, far mightier than the Jews ever were, have risen and vanished. With the decay of their civil institutions, they have rapidly melted away into the vast ocean of life. But the Hebrew national existence, unprotected by national forms, has proved an insoluble element in the world's population, in important respects, not merely floating hither and thither like a worthless weed, but controlling the current of affairs, obtaining a commercial supremacy upon which kings wait, and at whose bidding the sword rusts in the scabbard. A nation crushed and scattered, to every national purpose annihilated, yet a nation still! Distrusted, scorned, and vilified, yet neither deserting the ark of its ancient faith, nor attempting to bear it onward, but gathered round it in mute, immoveable, patience, standing, amidst the revolutions of the world and the wrecks of empires, like their own priests amidst the swelling tide of Jordan. Whatever else may be laid to their charge—to whatever dishonourable causes you may attribute their extraordinary thrift, however perverted and defective their religion may have been in its practical influence, still of indifference to that they cannot be accused. They have clung to it with an indomitable temper, claiming no credit for their loyalty. Here it is, still in the world, the ancient religion. And this cannot but strike us as the prominent feature of the Jewish mind, the depth and the power of the religious sentiment. Considering how

peculiarities of appearance and character are handed down from age to age, even if the early history of this singular people were hid in darkness, we should still infer from their later fortunes, from their present position, that they were of no common parentage—that the ancestors of such a race, the Hebrew Patriarchs, must have been men of an exalted religious temperament.

But there is another thing that leads to the same conclusion. The religion of Europe and America—those portions of the globe, which we call the civilized, came according to the flesh from the bosom of this people, which as a people, then, stands to the rest of the world in a relation far more commanding than that of any other nation. We turn from our earliest childhood with enthusiasm and reverence to Greece and Italy. These have been our guides in literature, law and art. But there is a loftier eminence than either Athens or Rome, and Zion towers high above the Acropolis and the Seven Hills. In reference to that interest, unspeakably the most momentous, religion, Judea is the mistress of the world, and well may that spot, where the Daughter of Zion once sat in her beautiful garments, be called for ever the Holy Land. The head of Christendom was of Hebrew extraction, born on Hebrew ground, nursed by a Hebrew mother.*

* When we consider what deep and angry prejudices have rolled for ages between Jews and Gentiles, we are struck with the fact, that, in the chief respect, the former are the guides and benefactors of the latter. The most wonderful of books has been handed across that black gulf. The world has been united against the Jews. Greek and Roman held them in contempt as a strange and superstitious people, and they have returned scorn for scorn. Nevertheless it was Jews who toiled and died to bestow, and it was from Jews that the world has received, the greatest of benefits. The Christian Scriptures, so widely received and honoured, are the works of Jewish hands, the gift of a people whom all the world has shunned. What a presumption of the truth, aye, and the divinity of these books does this one fact furnish! Were they cunningly devised fables, or mere delusions, it is incredible that they should have been received by those who were watching their authors with

These considerations may seem too general in their nature to possess any particular bearing on the subject in hand. But they are fitted to refresh our impressions of the high character and standing of the Israelitish nation; a sacred nation,—‘a nation of priests,’ ‘a royal priesthood,’ such it was the design of Providence, through their illustrious Lawgiver, to make them, and however false the generality of this people may have been to their great destiny, yet, from among them has issued One, a Priest for the whole world and for all time, Priest, Prophet, and King! Keeping in mind their national character, we turn to any one period of their history with awakened interest, and regard any prominent individual with new curiosity and respect, when we look at him in connexion with the imposing character of his country, and the extraordinary social influences radiating around him. Jesus and John were both, according to the flesh, of the great line of Abraham.

John was doubly connected with the priesthood. His father Zacharias was a priest. His mother Elizabeth was of the daughters of Aaron. And according to the high standard of Jewish piety, they were persons of blameless lives and eminent devotion. Their

the deepest distrust and shrinking from their very touch as contamination. If the Christian history had not in it the all-victorious force of truth, Gentiles never would have listened to it from those hated Jewish lips. If a fraud was to be practised on the world, were those whom the world was the first to suspect, most likely to attempt it, or to succeed in it when attempted? Had the world's best book issued from an association of renowned philosophers, then there might be reason to suspect that the rapid credit which it gained was to be attributed to the blinding influence of prejudice. But as the case stands, they who obtained the world's faith, were not the world's favourites but her foes, ‘the very filth and offscouring of the world,’ so the first teachers of Christ were esteemed, men, whom none would believe but on overwhelming evidence. There was even disposition in the Gentile mind not to believe. And Christianity offered no bribe to selfish passions. It had nothing to give but truth, and this attended by disgrace, privations and tortures.

only child, John, was born when they were advanced in years. And they had hailed his approaching birth with the profoundest religious thankfulness, the birth of a child being always, to the Hebrew's mind, invested with peculiar sacredness. Thus there was much in the parentage and early circumstances of the Baptist to exalt his nature. He was born and brought up,* as it were, within the hallowed precincts of a temple so venerable in the eyes of the nation, that the religious teachers declared that to consecrate one's possessions to the enriching of that edifice, was a more acceptable service than to devote them to the declining years of a father and mother. How must such a mind, as the whole history of John reveals, have been kindled as he stood before that altar, over which no majestic idol frowned or smiled, but where men came to adore the Unseen! A divine spirit communed with his spirit through all the awful associations of the splendid sanctuary and its multitudinous ceremonies. Upon the early history of the nation and its wonderful fortunes the ardent mind of the priest-descended youth was fed. The solemn forms of the old prophets swept before his illuminated vision. Their sacred words sounded in his ears. He saw them as they pointed into futurity. He listened to their predictions of a more than golden age, a celestial era yet to come. He caught the flame of that hope which, burning in the heart of Israel, was now mounting higher and growing more vivid as the period of its fulfilment drew nigh. By such training his spirit was led up to the Mount of

* Luke gives us to understand (ch. i. 80.) that the early years of the Baptist were spent 'in the deserts.' But the record is brief and indefinite. And we are not required to suppose that he was wholly a stranger to the city and the temple, or that no space of time elapsed after his birth before the wilderness became his residence.

Vision, where he heard the voice of God and received power to execute a divine mission.

But the circumstance, which, of all circumstances, must have wrought on him most powerfully, was his relation to Jesus. His mother Elizabeth was the cousin and friend and associate of Mary, the Divine Mother. With Jesus then we cannot but suppose that he held frequent communion. He listened to the young Son of God, the destined Ruler of generations and ages. Think you, he caught no inspiration from such a companion? He knew not, before the baptism of Jesus, that he was the Man who was to come. "I knew him not," he declares. Of course his meaning is that he did not know Jesus as the specially sent of God. That he was personally intimate with Jesus before his baptism is clear, from the manner in which he addressed him, when the latter came to be baptized and before the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. His exclamation, "comest thou to me? I have need to be baptized of thee!" shows that he not only knew Jesus personally, but had conceived for him the greatest reverence. As John had long known Jesus, and felt his great superiority, we obtain a satisfactory meaning of John's words when he says, "After me cometh a man who is preferred before me; *for he was before me.*" John had appeared first in public; yet he had always felt that Jesus was far in advance of him. He had always looked up to him as his superior. He had not inspired Jesus, but had been inspired by him. Jesus always from the first *was* before him. And the knowledge he had of his great Kinsman, and the reverence, with which he regarded him, (there is no feeling so quickening as veneration,) had contributed to deepen his conviction that the blessed era was close at hand. Not until after the baptism of Jesus, did John

feel fully authorised to avow his belief in him as the Expected. And even then his faith faltered once, as we infer from the message which he sent to Jesus from prison by two of his disciples, "Art thou he that shall come, or must we look for another?" But before Jesus appeared in public, he was regarded with the deepest veneration by the Baptist, who knew that a character of such quiet, but unequalled power, was destined to act with unknown force upon the world. When he had himself produced a great sensation by his appearance in the wilderness, and the whole country was moved by his voice, the people caught the idea that he was the Christ. But he disclaimed the office. For he knew that a far greater than he was near him. His own exalted mind had been stirred by the living words of Jesus. Again and again they had caused his heart to burn and tremble within him. They had so raised the whole tone of his being, that he had reached that spiritual eminence which touches Heaven, where angel-harmonies may be overheard, and where he listened to the voice of God, and received the divine command to announce the approaching kingdom. He had descried its coming already, within, in his own heart. He declared to the people that he was only the herald of the king, not the king himself, that there stood one among them, so glorious and exalted, that he himself, highly as they thought of him, "was not worthy to unloose the latchet of his shoe." I understand this expression as prompted not by the general idea which, as a Jew, he had formed of the coming Messiah, but by his personal reverence for Jesus whom he knew. And so it was, I conceive, with all the allusions which he makes to him who was to succeed him, and which possess a new force when thus regarded, as prompted by his personal knowledge

of Jesus. He had Jesus in his mind. He had felt in his own soul,—he knew, the searching, burning, power of his illustrious relative, and therefore he said, “I use only water as a sign and means of inward cleansing, but he that will shortly appear will purify you, penetrating your inmost hearts with a holy spirit* and with fire.”

John was the last of the Hebrew prophets. “The least in the kingdom of Heaven was greater than he.” The whole mode of his appearance, austere, ascetic, was in accordance with Jewish ways of feeling. Like the prophet Elijah, and all those who, in the ancient days of the nation, aimed at the strictest sanctity, he was clad in the rudest manner, in a garment of camel’s hair bound round him with a leathern girdle. His food was the simple and scanty produce of the desert where he appeared. He announced himself in the consecrated language of one of the old prophets. Of those who resorted to him, he required the observance of a rite, already familiar to the Jews, baptism. He imposed fasts upon his disciples. All these things were fitted to arrest the Jewish eye and ear. And accordingly we read that ‘all held John to be a prophet.’

* It is impossible to convey the full force of this word ‘*spirit*’ in a translation. The original word is much more comprehensive than the word, ‘spirit.’ It signifies also ‘air,’ ‘wind,’ and the meaning of the Baptist is, ‘water is the symbol of my office, but the power of him who is coming after me may be signified by far subtler and more searching elements, ‘wind and fire.’ That the Baptist used this word (translated ‘ghost,’ and ‘spirit,’) with this significance, appears from the connection. He instantly likens his successor to a husbandman prepared with his fan to blow the chaff out of the wheat, and with fire to consume it. ‘Not this baptism, this water that I use, will cleanse you; but One is coming who will purify you as with a wind and a fire from Heaven. He will stand among you, like a husbandman with his fan in his hand, amidst his heaps of unwinnowed wheat, and thoroughly sweep the floor, garnering up the wheat, and casting the chaff into unquenchable fire.’

That teachers of the law and supercilious Pharisees went with the whole country and were baptized by him, acknowledging his authority and confessing their sins, is significant of the congeniality between the appearance of John and Jewish modes of thought.

The difference between John and Him who came after him is obvious in all these things, and it is otherwise marked. From the prison into which he was thrown by Herod, John sent two of his disciples to inquire of Jesus, who had then appeared publicly, teaching, and working miracles, whether he were the Messiah, or another was to be looked for. It has been thought that the Baptist sent his disciples on this errand for their satisfaction, not his own. But if he had no misgivings himself, he might easily have satisfied his disciples, with whom the authority of their master was supreme. Had his confidence in Jesus as the Christ been entire, he could not have endured himself, nor would he have suffered his disciples, to put a question to Jesus implying the least dissatisfaction. In implicit faith he would have waited, and enjoined it upon others to wait, for Jesus to vindicate his own claims in his own way. He would have perceived all the force of the evidence which Jesus was giving in his works of power and mercy, and in the proclamation of the Gospel to the poor ; and directed the attention of his disciples to what Jesus was doing, as furnishing decisive attestations to the truth of his pretensions. We are justified therefore in supposing that John sympathised in a degree with the popular impressions respecting the Messiah's Kingdom and glory. It was, no doubt, on account of his defective ideas on this point that Jesus declared that 'the least in the kingdom of Heaven was greater than he.' And for this reason

also, because he looked for the Christ to assume an outward dignity, he became impatient of his own imprisonment, and began to be disturbed because Jesus had done nothing towards his liberation, and no tidings came of such events as should accompany the appearance of the Messiah. It is from the message which he sent to Jesus from prison that we infer the imperfection of his views and pronounce him still only a Hebrew prophet.

But while we rank him with the Jewish Seers, we account him the greatest of that illustrious line of which he was the last. If the least in the kingdom of Heaven was greater than he, before him there had not arisen a greater. While in his garb and whole proceeding he breathed the spirit of Elijah, and his heart glowed with the old prophetic fire, his ideas of the coming kingdom, though they corresponded in a degree with popular notions and he looked for a political revolution, were still eminently spiritual. The preparation for the expected kingdom to which he summoned his countrymen was of a moral nature. He aimed principally to reach their hearts and reform their manners. He saw how hollow were those grounds upon which they expected the blessing of God. "Think not to say in yourselves," said he, "we have Abraham for our father. Make not your descent from the great patriarch your merit. For I tell you, God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. If you expect to share in the honours of the coming reign, let not your repentance be a form but an act. Let it produce works corresponding thereto." He saw too through the pretended saints of the day, and without hesitation or fear poured out upon them his indignant denunciations. His high authority as a moral teacher is seen in his

bold rebuke of a powerful prince for marrying a brother's wife, that brother being still living. Upon John, of all the prophets, the near glory of the kingdom of Heaven had fallen, and he had caught far more of its spirit than any of his predecessors. This, as I conceive, was attributable in great measure to the influence of Jesus with whom he had associated.

The various notices of the Baptist furnish a striking instance of the consistency for which the Gospels are remarkable, and which, as I have observed, is one of the indubitable signs of Truth. Every thing told of him is in character. His austere mode of life, his requiring his disciples to observe fasts, the prominence he gave to the use of water as a symbol of inward cleansing, an external form, oriental, Jewish, his bold denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees, his uncompromising tone, and his faithful rebuke of Herod—all, briefly but distinctly stated, help to individualise his character to the imagination. Although, as we gather from the record, his career was of short duration, yet while it lasted, it was full of power. The whole country was moved at his appearance, at the rumour of that Voice sounding in the wilderness. Men started up as if the van of the august retinue of the Messiah had visibly appeared, approaching from the Desert. We are told in the strong language of the East, that all Jerusalem went forth to be baptized of John in the Jordan, there to confess and wash away their sins, and array themselves in sabbath-attire of the soul to hail their coming Deliverer. The Baptist drew around him a peculiar body of disciples, who long cherished his memory and acknowledged him as their Head. Long after his decease, after the final disappearance of Jesus,

the Apostle Paul found at Ephesus, a far off city of Greece, certain disciples of John, who appear to have known but little of the ministry of Jesus.*

Although, as we have seen, John cherished the deepest reverence for Jesus, and acknowledged his great superiority, yet the Baptist preserved a peculiar and independent character. Their aim was the same. They both appeared announcing that the kingdom of God was at hand. Still, beyond a unity of spirit, there is not the slightest trace of a pre-arranged concert of action between them. The holy spirit of Jesus gave much of its life to the lesser spirit of John. But it did not prescribe his rules nor dictate his methods. These are characterised by his own peculiar temperament. He spake at the bidding, not of Jesus, but of the voice of God; though all he had known of Jesus and all he had felt towards him had tended to qualify him for the office of a Heaven-sent messenger.

Jesus, in his own way, original and matchless, has given us a description of John, not an elaborate portrait, but a bold and impressive sketch—two or three lines, and the likeness comes before us, vivid and powerful. There is a significance in the passage referred to of which readers in general have had no adequate impression. After the two disciples, who had brought the message of their Master to Jesus, had left him, he turned to the crowd and spoke of John, “What,” said he, “went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out to see? A man clad in soft raiment? They that wear soft clothing are in king’s houses. But what went ye out to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more

* See Michaelis’s Introduction.

than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee.' Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of woman, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist; notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he." Here, by the suggestion of strong contrasts, Jesus causes the prominent features of the Baptist to stand out in the boldest relief. I conceive the meaning of this passage to be, "When a little while ago you flocked in such crowds to the desert, what drew you thither? What went ye to see? A reed shaken by every wind? One of Lebanon's own cedars rather! A reed? No, a man, a man of no bending, but of the sternest, spirit. But again I ask what did ye go to see? A man daintily arrayed? Oh, no! John's garb, the rudest, his present dwelling, a dungeon where he has been cast for his fearless rebuke of sin in high places, show that he cares not for the blandishments of a palace or the menaces of a tyrant. It was neither of these that drew you in such multitudes into the wilderness, no man of a yielding, reed-like temper, no delicate, flattering inmate of a king's house. You went to see a prophet? Yes, and more than a prophet, one who has completely fulfilled the prophetic declaration of Scripture, and shown himself to be sent by God to prepare the way of the Lord. I solemnly declare to you that of all mortal men, there hath not arisen a greater than this John; yet still the least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he." In declaring John to be the greatest of all mortal men that had yet appeared, Jesus gives expression to his own deep sense of the powerful character of the Baptist, and the warmth of personal confidence and friendship gives colour and boldness to his language. We misunderstand him if we consider

him as laying down a formal proposition that John was the greatest of men. Our Saviour spoke naturally and strongly under the deep impression of the moment. Deep feeling seldom stops to limit and qualify and guard its utterances.

The attempt, which I have now made to describe the relation between Jesus and John, to show how the spirit of the one was kindled and exalted by the wisdom and holiness of the other, is, I am aware, very imperfect. The influence of Jesus upon the Baptist, will be recognised by the thoughtful reader of the Scriptures. If we only knew what it is to be associated with a being thoroughly pure and true, we should be qualified to appreciate this topic. We are compelled to witness, in those whom we most respect, great imperfections that necessarily lessen our confidence and their influence. Still none are insensible to the stirring power of a wise and just man over those who enjoy the privilege of his friendship. The feeble representations of goodness that we meet, with all their defects—how powerfully do they move us, and to what strong language do they prompt. Listen to men as they speak of those who have commanded their admiration and respect. Observe the warmth of their words and tones. In what exalted terms do they express their reverence. By some effort of mind we may conceive how the original, religious, nature of the Son of Zacharias was moved by converse with his inspired relative and friend. To doubt whether an influence so holy and penetrating was felt by the Baptist, is to discredit, not only the whole history of the New Testament, but human nature itself.

In the appearance and procedure of John the traces

of his Hebrew origin, his priestly descent, of his place, and his age, are very obvious. In this respect he stands with all other mortal men at the greatest distance below Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew in his garb and speech. But in all other respects, he had 'walked forth into universality,' unimpeded by local and temporary associations, by Jewish prejudices. His being dwelt and shone with divine, unborrowed light, in the sphere of Universal Truth and Rectitude and Love. His visible features, his voice, his speech, may have been the features, the voice, the speech, of a Jew. But his spirit, the central life of him, as it is revealed in his utterances and acts, was divine, heaven-born, the manifest offspring and Son of God.

CHAPTER III.

THE BAPTISM.

“The visible heavens and earth sympathise with Jesus.”—*Nature*.

“**THEN** cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering, said unto him, suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized went up straightway out of the water; and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him. And, lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

It is of manifest importance that what we see, we should see clearly. We are not indeed to require, as an absolute condition of faith, that we should be able to see, or even to image distinctly to the mind, the thing in which we are to believe. Because there are things, which, from their very nature, do not admit of being pictured even to the imagination, such as God and one's own soul.* But when the matter proposed is confessedly an object of sense, a scene that addresses the eye, clear vision is supremely desirable. We may not ask to see those things which eye hath never seen

* See Edinb. Rev. vol. 46, p. 330. English ed.

and can never see. But of that which professes visibility, let us have the distinctest sight. Accordingly, it is necessary to a due faith in the Baptism of Jesus with its attendant circumstances as a Fact, that it should be distinctly represented to the mind. With this understanding, and a single desire to apprehend the actual state of the case, what it was that occurred on this occasion, let us examine the above account.

To the literal acceptance of the passage, which I have quoted from Matthew, and with which Mark and Luke agree in substance, a strong objection presents itself in the outset. If we suppose that the visible heavenly vault was actually opened, and that out of the abyss an apparition in the shape of a dove issued, and, descending in the way represented by the painters, alighted upon Jesus, then are we compelled in a manner to localise our idea of Heaven, and sanction is given to the belief that the peculiar residence of God is *above*. Now was it not the grand and steady aim of Jesus to teach us otherwise, to lead us to look for Heaven and for God not in space but in the spirit, here, within, in our own inmost being? His express language and the whole point of his teaching is, "Ye shall not say, Lo! here, or Lo! there, for the kingdom of God is within you." Can any one, who has caught the spirit of Christ in the humblest degree, avoid perceiving a want of consentaneousness between the account of the Baptism of Jesus, taken literally, and the eminently inward, spiritual, nature of his religion? The grand attestations to his authority are found in those words of his, full of spirit and of life,* and in those miracles which also were words, divine signs of invisible things, power, meekness, and love. Accordingly, the best com-

* John, vi. 63.

mentators, and many Christians with them, give up the idea of the actual appearance of a preternatural dove at the Baptism, and venture no further towards a distinct apprehension of the fact than to suppose that there was some luminous appearance, a formless body, (so to speak,) of light, that descended upon Jesus, resembling a dove, not in shape, but only in the manner of its motion. But to this interpretation there are decisive objections. It is directly contradicted by Luke, who states expressly that that which descended upon Jesus was like a dove "in bodily shape." Besides, although it apparently spiritualises the incident, it is still essentially material, and by its vagueness, loses more than it gains. While one observes that the light (or lightning, as some of the learned seem to consider it,) descended gently, slowly, like a dove, another remarks that it descended rapidly.*

Upon a thoughtful examination of this portion of the great history, I am inclined to believe that a real dove flew down and alighted upon the person, probably on the head, of Jesus. Whence it came, and how so extraordinary an incident happened to take place, are points of which there may be no specific solution. The simple fact is all that I am now anxious to settle. And that there was a dove actually there, seen to fly down and rest on our Saviour, the construction of the language, the manner in which it is mentioned, furnishes a strong reason for believing. The narrators do not say directly that a dove descended and rested on Jesus.

* Rosenmuller says that the "fulgor" was seen descending not suddenly but by degrees, as doves are wont, adding that the flying of a dove, especially when descending, "has in it something peculiar." And yet Kuinoel characterises the motion of a descending dove as "*celeriter et leniter auram perstrepens*."

The phrase, in the use of which they all concur, is, "the Holy Spirit descended *like* a dove,"—"in bodily shape," adds Luke. There are two things that lead to the idea that an actual dove was visible.

1. A dove is mentioned in all the accounts. Now if no dove were visible, and the writers meant only to say that something appeared, in some degree resembling a dove, there is a probability that in one or another of the narrations, the similitude would have been varied. The distinct mention of a dove in four different accounts without any variation, implies that the apparition was peculiarly, strikingly, to all appearances, like a dove, and like nothing else ; and, therefore, there is room to suspect that it really was a dove. If a number of different relations of some remarkable appearance all united, in describing it as resembling a certain object, it certainly would be a fair, although not a decisive, inference that it was that object.

2. If we suppose that it actually was a dove that was seen, then *the fact is described precisely as we should expect under the circumstances.*

We must try, imperfect as the attempt will be, to enter into these circumstances. We are wont to read this passage all too coldly. We do not fully consider what a great occasion, what a moment it was, that is thus simply described, and the common idea of it is vague and superficial. We must concentrate our best strength upon this portion of the history, in order to see all that was going on there, visibly and invisibly, upon the banks of the time-honoured Jordan. That Person, who has just been baptised, and who is ascending out of the water, is one, the like of whom the world has never before seen, and whose name is destined to fill the earth, and to be foremost among the world's most sacred symbols. In him there is a

miraculous spirit, the fullest effluence and the brightest reflexion of the Almighty. None born of woman have ever received such gifts as God hath endowed him with without measure. That eye penetrates into the heart of things; and to him the mystery of Being is an infinite harmony. A man all-divine. And how does the Baptist look upon him? With a quiet and composed countenance, as he would regard an ordinary person or thing? Had he not already conceived for Jesus the unspeakable reverence with which such a being must have inspired the high-souled Baptist? Did we not see him just now refuse to baptise one, before whom he felt himself as nothing, with the exclamation, "I have need to be baptised of thee, and comest thou to me!" Has he not again and again confessed the vast superiority of the man of Nazareth, saying, that he himself was 'not worthy even to unloose the latches of his shoes?' The baptiser must have gazed upon Jesus with breathless awe, with eyes kindled with the deepest emotion. The moment must, then, have been to John, a moment of solemn, soul-thrilling excitement, one of those moments which seem, from the intensity of the feelings awakened, to be the concentration of ages.

And when we turn from the baptiser to the baptised, shall we imagine for a single instant that to Jesus himself the occasion was any other than one of transcendent, indescribable interest? Whatever it may have been to others, not to him was the rite of baptism a mere formality. His whole great soul was engaged in it. We cannot tell, nor scarcely in the faintest degree conceive, what at that instant must have been his feelings. Then it was, that, binding himself irrevocably and in spotless pureness of spirit to his own holy idea of duty, giving himself up without the slightest

;

reservation to the perfect will of God, he had, instantaneously formed within him, a perfect conviction of his great destiny. Then his self-knowledge was made entire. In coming to be baptised, to perform an outward and public act significant of inward self-consecration, he took the first step towards realising those feelings which had previously existed only in the silence of his own bosom. This was the first formal embodiment of the divine life which was in him. "Conviction, were it never so excellent, is worthless till it convert itself into conduct. Nay, properly speaking, conviction is not possible till then, inasmuch as all speculation is by nature endless, formless, a vortex amid vortices; only by a felt, indubitable certainty of experience, does it find any centre to revolve round, and so fashion itself into a system. Most true is it, as a wise man teaches us, that 'doubt of any sort cannot be removed except by action.' On which ground, too, let him who gropes painfully in darkness or uncertain light, and prays vehemently that the dawn may ripen into day, lay this other precept well to heart, which to me was of invaluable service: 'Do the duty which lies nearest thee,' which thou knowest to be a duty! Thy second duty will already have become clearer."*

In quoting this passage as illustrative of the history of the mind of Jesus, let me not be supposed to imply that before his baptism, he was disturbed by doubts, or that he "groped painfully in darkness," but simply this, that the light which shone in him before that public act, mild, steady, and increasing as it was, was only less clear and strong than that which flowed in upon him, when he had performed that service, taken that one step forward. Then 'by

* Carlyle.

a felt, indubitable certainty of experience, conviction, being converted into conduct, into an act, was transformed into knowledge. Now the slightest shadow of uncertainty was no longer possible. He had put his long cherished convictions to the last, infallible, only remaining test, and by the ineffable peace that filled all his soul, the divine assurance that he received of approbation and love, he *knew* himself to have been appointed from the foundation of the world to the most godlike of labours.

If such were the feelings of Jesus, they must have appeared in his whole mien and in his countenance. An illumination must have beamed from his features which no art could portray, no imagination conceive. And in the burning gaze of the fervid Baptist he must have been transfigured.

Suppose a dove at this moment to have appeared hovering over him and alighting on his person, how must it have startled John, seeming in his eyes nothing less than an apparition from heaven! A simple bird it was, but in the glow of the beholder's mind it was glorified. It lost its familiar appearance and seemed unearthly; and in the lofty state of his mind John could not say, nor could he have thought at such a moment, that it was only a common dove. He could only describe it as '*like* a dove.' It had to the outward eye 'the bodily shape' of a dove, but to the eye of the soul gazing upon the spiritual lineaments, the heavenly glory of Jesus, it was irradiated by the halo which encircled him, and converted at once into a special apparition, the sacred symbol of the Holy Spirit, the present God.

Is there not here the divine touch of nature? How frequently do strong emotions invest with a character corresponding thereto, the most familiar objects, strip-

ping them of all meanness and converting them into spiritual significations ! So it was, by the over-mastery of the mind, that reptiles and things without life became objects of religious fear, and man, in a passion of awe, ceased to see the world in its coarse work-day garb. It every where, through all its parts, even the lowest, became sacred to him, and the mind, exalted to bewilderment, 'darted out its forked flame on whatever came in its way, and kindling and melting it in its own fire,' moulded it into correspondence with its own emotions, until it saw itself surrounded by gods, moving in all motion, speaking through all sounds. But this, it will be urged, was superstition. It was human nature, and it reveals the principles of human nature, the spirit we are of. And what is more, there was truth in it, infinitely more of truth than there is in the sensual tendency of the present times, which gives a dead, mechanical, aspect to all nature. It is infinitely better that the solid universe should be fused into an ethereal spirit by the force of the imagination, than hardened by the understanding, compressing all things into logical forms, into a machine grinding steadily indeed, without derangement, but without life. But letting this go, the fact remains indisputable. Outward objects are continually receiving significance from the mind, and in the simplest movement an excited imagination may behold the very finger of God, and the most familiar thing may appear (what indeed it is) 'an angel from heaven.*

* To Lear the meanest things became conspirators in the great league in which all things, the very heavens themselves, had united against him. See Hazlitt's *Plain Speaker*. For a splendid and thrilling illustration of the power of the mind to give a meaning to outward nature correspondent to its own impressions at the moment, see "Nature," (page 24 et seq.) an extraordinary work, in the perusal of which it becomes the reader to remember Coleridge's rule, 'When you cannot understand an author's ignorance, account yourself ignorant of his understanding.'

These things being so, the account given above of the extraordinary appearance at the baptism of Jesus may not seem wholly improbable. Whence the dove came, and how it happened to alight on him, are questions that may be asked, but they are of very little interest comparatively. The simple fact of the appearance of the dove and the manner in which this appearance was interpreted, these alone are the points which rivet my attention, and it is interesting to take the view of the case now suggested, because it lets us into the spirit of the occasion, shows us how elevated the mind of John must have been at the moment, since he saw an awful significance in the appearance of a simple dove, and thus furnishes indirect testimony to the divine force of the character of Jesus which had produced that elevation. For my own part I find no insurmountable difficulty in the belief that the gentle creature was drawn, through that mysterious sympathy which pervades all things, towards Jesus, his countenance, as he ascended from the water, being upturned in prayer and glowing in every feature with infinite blessedness. We know that when men have visited newly discovered regions, never before tracked by human feet, birds and beasts, exhibiting no signs of fear or distrust, have regarded them not as foes but as friends. And if, as it is blessed to hope, this earth is destined to witness a holy era when men, at peace with themselves, shall return into full communion and fellowship with universal nature, why may we not suppose that the whole appearance of Jesus, his effulgent countenance especially, represented, at that elevated moment of baptism, this divine condition of humanity? He looked then as man is destined to look hereafter, when the inferior creatures shall confide in his innocence, and fly to him for protection. The dove then

may have been drawn to Jesus by that invisible Spirit without whom not a sparrow falls to the ground. If so, then was it a heaven-sent witness to the divinity of his character and claims.

But there were other imposing concomitants of the baptism of Jesus. The opening of the heavens, and the heavenly voice.

Rosenmuller, Schleusner and Kuinoel understand the phrase, "and the heavens were opened," as signifying that it lightened, lightning producing the appearance of the skies being rent. But although instances of a similar mode of speaking are adduced from profane authors, these learned commentators refer to no instance of the same kind in the Scriptures, and to fortify their interpretation resort to Epiphanius, who, upon the authority of the Gospel of the Ebionites, declares that, at the baptism of Jesus, "straightway a great light shone round the place," and to Justin Martyr, who states that 'a fire was kindled (on the same occasion) in the Jordan.' These authorities, it is evident, afford but very feeble support to the idea that the opening of the heavens is a phrase employed merely as descriptive of the effect produced by lightning.

It is worthy of note that in the Baptist's own account of the Baptism of Jesus, as it stands in the Gospel of John the Evangelist, no mention is made of the heavens being opened. If the Baptist had witnessed any extraordinary miraculous phenomenon in the firmament, it is not easy to account for the omission. In connection with this omission, it is also to be remarked that the grammatical construction of the language in the other three gospels authorises the idea that the heavens were opened not to John but to Jesus. The passage in Matthew reads thus: "And Jesus when he was baptized,

went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto *him*." Violations of the rule, however, concerning the relative and antecedent occur in the Scriptures. Therefore the pronoun does not necessarily refer to Jesus. It may relate to John. I conclude, however, from the other notices, and from a consideration of all the circumstances, that Jesus is the antecedent, and that the meaning of Matthew is, "And Jesus when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto *Jesus*, and *John* saw the spirit of God descending, &c." The grammatical question, however, is of very little importance. Two modes of explaining the phrase "the heavens were opened" suggest themselves. If John believed, as, under the circumstances, and in the exaltation of his feelings, he could not help doing, that the dove was a celestial messenger, sent down at the moment from heaven, then was it his natural and instantaneous inference that the heavens opened to give egress to the bird. It may be therefore that an inference is stated as a visible fact. But the following appears to be the most probable explanation of this language.

According to Luke, Jesus came up out of the water, after he was baptized, "*praying*." I have already intimated how unspeakably impressive this act of Baptism must have been to him. It was the consecration of his whole being to God, the divinest offering ever presented to heaven. On all occasions his prayers were the truest that ever ascended to the throne of Infinite Goodness. And when he ascended out of the river, praying, his countenance, glowing with the lofty emotions that filled his great spirit, must have shone with a brightness like the sun. Had the veil of the visible

heavens been rent in twain before him, and a beatific vision of Majesty and Love been spread before his eyes, his countenance could not have borne more expressive testimony to his inward exaltation. His sense of the Divine Presence was at that moment as vivid and intimate as if the very heavens were opened and he beheld the Everlasting Throne and Him who sitteth thereon smiling on him with fatherly love. His countenance was as of one communing with the revealed glories of the better world, and John beheld there in that Face a brightness, the reflection of Heaven, and Jesus seemed like one, looking with his bodily eyes at angelic spirits, and at the Father of Spirits. He, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shone into the heart of John, and gave him the light of the knowledge of the glory of heaven *in the face of Jesus Christ*.

This explanation is corroborated by a passage in the very same chapter of John, in which the Baptism is recorded, (i. 51.) When Nathaniel, upon witnessing an instance of the miraculous knowledge of Jesus, exclaimed, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the king of Israel," Jesus answered and said unto him, 'Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these.' And he saith unto him, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see *heaven open* and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.' That this language is figurative will not be doubted. But when I consider what and how wonderful those things were, which are here described as the opening of heaven and the ascending and descending of angels, and which those, whom he addressed, subsequently witnessed,—his miracles of power and mercy, his sufferings, and his rising from the dead—this figure

of speech seems to me neither violent nor too strong. What with Jewish modes of thought and expression, this language, vivid indeed, is natural but still inadequate. It could hardly have been stronger. Yet, after all, it does but imperfectly describe what took place thereafter, and what the disciples saw. Had the skies parted asunder, had visible angels ascended and descended, they, who witnessed what Jesus did, and heard his inspired words, could not have had in the spectacle, however imposing, such decisive evidence of the intimate communication between him and the heavenly world and the Almighty Father, as they possessed in the miracles they actually beheld. The spectators of his life, the hearers of his teaching, did indeed see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending. And they saw more. For in him they saw God. "Whosoever hath seen me, hath seen the Father," said Jesus to the very Philip who was with Nathaniel when that impressive promise was made to him. If those then, who beheld the works and listened to the word of Jesus, are said to have seen "heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man," with how much greater significance may it be said, that the heavens were opened (at his Baptism) unto him, who felt the divine presence in his own spirit and beheld the glory of heaven, and in whose illuminated face the vision and the faith were expressed.

It will be seen that there is no inconsistency in the different explanations which I have proposed of the phrase, "the heavens were opened." The sudden appearance of the dove, conjoined with the inspired looks of Jesus, coming up out of the water in prayer, conspired to lift up the spirit of the Baptist and to produce the vivid impression that the very heavens were opened

at that moment to Jesus. In that divine countenance heaven was thrown open to John also.

“And, lo, a voice from heaven, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’” In the first chapter of his Gospel, John the Evangelist has given us John the Baptist’s own account of the occasion, as follows: “And John bare record, saying, ‘I saw the Spirit descending from Heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptise with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he who baptiseth with the Holy Spirit. And I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God.’” Now it is observable that in this account of the Baptist’s there is no mention of a voice from Heaven. Had an audible voice from Heaven been heard, it certainly would have been the principal and most direct testimonial to the divine character of Jesus. It would have been the circumstance which would most powerfully impress and decide the mind of John. But he declares that he knew Jesus to be the Son of God, not because he heard a voice declaring the fact, but because he saw the Spirit of God, descending and remaining on him. This was the token by which Jesus was designated to the Baptist as the Son of God.

Such being the character of the Baptist’s account, it may be inferred that no voice was audible, at least to John or to any of the bystanders. Jesus alone heard the voice from heaven. And this inference is somewhat confirmed by the fact that two out of the three other narratives give us the words as addressed directly to Jesus, “*Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased.*”

But was an articulate voice actually heard by Jesus? Let us keep in view, as we are able, the character of his feelings at the moment. It was a moment of inexpressible exaltation. Frequently before, during the previous years of his life, his spirit had mounted into communion and intercourse with his Almighty Father. Many a time and oft, we must believe, he had heard the voice of God in the recesses of his own soul, summoning him to his great work. Visions more and more vivid, voices more and more clear had visited him. The purest spiritual emotions had become habitual with him, and he had been daily and hourly approaching to that elevation of mind and will of which his baptism was the crowning consummation. Then he rose to the loftiest height of self-devotion, and his whole being was given up to whatever the divine voice might call him. No vow so divine and sincere had ever before been made on earth or recorded in Heaven. Never before had a human will been raised into such entire harmony with the divine will or man approached so near to God. As he came up out of the water in which he had cleansed himself of every selfish weakness, and where he had given himself up to the purest of aims, an ineffable peace filled his bosom and caused his face to beam. The fullest assurance of divine favour fell at once upon his heart, and he *knew* himself to be an object of infinite approbation. This was the voice from Heaven, infinitely more distinct and satisfying than any audible voice, which spake to him with unearthly melody, and caused him to know that he was the beloved Son of God, in whom God was well pleased. Could any articulate sounds addressed to the outward, fallible ear, have produced a conviction of divine favour so complete and

intimate, as this which was formed within him by the Holy Spirit of God mysteriously communing with his spirit? If, as we may suppose, Jesus described the feeling of that moment to John the Baptist or John the Beloved, or to any of his friends, it seems to me he could hardly have avoided describing it precisely as it is stated in the records. He must have felt as if a spiritual voice sounded through his whole being, declaring him to be regarded with a love like the love of an Infinite Father for a faithful Son.

In illustration of this view of the case, I do not allude to the boldness which characterised the language of the time and the place, although this is a consideration, which, when faithfully meditated, will help us to a better apprehension of this and of all parts of the Sacred History. But I would rather refer to the fact, that almost always, in all times and places, men speak of the deep and sudden impressions made on them, the seasons of mental exaltation, as produced by a voice or voices. I took up the other day a tract which had been thrown in at my door, and which related the experience of an individual in whom a deep sense of sin had been awakened. In his distress he states that he heard a voice saying to him, 'Repent of thy sins and thou shalt be forgiven.' The thought, thus expressed, was by the Holy Spirit so distinctly fashioned to his mind that he started as if an audible voice had addressed him. A short time since, I was reading in a daily print an account of the death of Marshal Duroc. It appears that he had a presentiment of his approaching end, and he asserted solemnly to a friend that he had *heard a voice*, assuring him that the next day's battle would be fatal to him. Examples might be adduced without number, all showing

how natural it is to represent sudden and powerful convictions of mind as produced by a *voice*. God forbid that we should be so blind to the mysterious heights and depths of man's nature as to pronounce all these, delusions! It is true, articulate voices, literally speaking, may not have been heard on such occasions, but the fact of impressions (beyond the power of any sound to produce,) made on the mind and made too by the Infinite Spirit who is every where around and within us, cannot be questioned without denying the presence and providence of God.

Especially have they, to whom it has been given to entertain high resolves, to put forth the loftiest powers of the will, felt in their own pure consciousness an indisputable persuasion of a superhuman influence on their being. The conviction of heavenly communication was far stronger than if it had been produced by the ministry of the eye and the ear and the hand. And they have expressed themselves accordingly, averring that they acted at the bidding of a voice from Heaven—that they were guided by the finger of God. The world, blinded by sense, has derided their pretensions or driven them away as insane fanatics. But gradually controlled and moulded by their power, it has at last bowed down to them, and borne record that it was the divinity by which they were sent and moved. The strength of this faith as it has appeared in prophets and apostles and martyrs, the fulness in which it exists in a mind elevated by the practice of truth, and quickened by virtue, and its beneficial influences—all conspire to make us feel that it is founded in reality—that a divine power *is* actually present in a holy will, and a divine voice *is* heard in the peace of a true heart. Men have laboured to reason themselves,

(but their subtleties and sophistries are all in vain) out of the faith, that here in the inner and unfathomed mystery of their own soul is an opening, an avenue, a sense, call it what you will, whereby a power transcending all ordinary power comes near to them, and, according to its own perfect pleasure, elects certain individuals to be prophets and apostles, workers of miracles, utterers of divine truth, saviours of generations and of worlds. All tongues and languages have forms of speech suggested and modified by this divine faith. In the humble emergencies of daily life how often are we made conscious of a new and unexpected force, 'a strength not our own—a reason above reason.' It comes over us, and it acts through us like the inspiration of a God. Alas for us! that it comes so rarely and its stay is so brief. It is the pure inspiration of Heaven. I am not now using figures, but endeavouring to state what seems to be a truth of indescribable moment, the foundation of all truth, of all belief, of all hope.

Herein is the unspeakable worth of Jesus Christ. Beyond all others he was created in a likeness of God. No other has ever been gifted as he was. He always spoke and acted upon the fullest faith that he was sent and empowered by God. What in others is a dim and occasional faith was in him knowledge. In himself he recognised the Holy Spirit. Of himself, he affirmed, he could do nothing. The Father dwelling in him, He did the works. This was his consciousness. He was born with it. It was the gift and endowment of Heaven. He had acted upon it from the earliest period of his life. But in the new and perfect peace which instantly filled his whole being upon the performance of his first public act, of self-consecration at

his baptism, he felt the inspiration of God stirring within him as he had never felt it before, and he heard the divine voice in his soul declaring him to be the object of Infinite Love. Henceforth there was no delay. Immediately, after the briefest pause, he commenced his high career, and was obedient to the word written upon his heart, to the voice speaking there as from heaven, even unto death.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TEMPTATION.

" Evil into the mind of God or man
 May come and go, so unapproved and leave
 No spot or blame behind."—*Milton*.

THE Baptism of Jesus, being such as I have endeavoured to describe it, the Temptation follows immediately thereupon as a natural consequence.

From the nature of the human mind, seasons of new and uncommon exaltation are succeeded by periods of exhaustion. When one has long meditated a great purpose, and has at last, formally, irrevocably, bound himself to its execution, there frequently occurs a temporary recoil of the spirit. He finds himself in a new position, and looks at his situation from a new point of view; and its duties and perils rise before him in a distincter and more imposing light.*

The habitual tone of the mind of Jesus was singularly elevated. Still we cannot doubt that he experienced variations of feeling, and that at times his spirit was unusually raised. There were occasions when the holy spirit, which dwelt in him as it never before nor since

* Scott glances at this fact in the human constitution, in the tale of the Black Dwarf, where he describes the flagging spirits of the seditious assembly at Ellieslaw Castle. "They experienced the chilling revulsion of spirits which often takes place when men are called upon to take a desperate resolution, after having placed themselves in circumstances where it is alike difficult to advance or recede."

dwelt in flesh, descended upon him to overflowing. He was always conscious of the arms of Infinite Love thrown around him, but at times he felt himself reposing on the bosom of his heavenly Father. The history bears direct testimony to the truth of these remarks.

Once, when, exhausted by hunger and thirst and fatigue, he chanced to enter into conversation with a woman of Samaria, he was so exhilarated thereby that he cared not to eat or drink. His soul ascended at once the mount of Vision and found immortal sustenance in gazing upon the moral harvest waving in ripeness before him. By the nature of things these celestial visitations, when they ceased, were succeeded by something like depression. When the intensest light of the Divine Countenance had beamed upon him for awhile, it was not followed by absolute darkness, but there was a temporary dimness produced by the excess of light. So also these periods of exhaustion and temptation were in their turn succeeded by new strength.

It is observable that the last and sorest trial, the agony in the Garden, occurred just after a superhuman and long-sustained elevation of mind. At the last Supper, when Judas went out to execute his base purpose, the nearness of his fate broke with new force upon the heart of Jesus. But his first sight of that event, from so close a point of view, was not of its dark and suffering aspect. It did not produce horror, but the sublimest joy. "Now," he exclaimed, "is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him!" In that catastrophe, which, to all human seeming, involved himself and his cause in hopeless ruin, he beheld a blaze of the Divine Glory. This was the first impression caught from a nearer prospect of his fate. The next thought was of his friends and disciples from whom he would be severed by death. And he instantly devotes himself

to the office of preparing and comforting them. With the fourteenth chapter of John, the record of these generous consolations commences, and it continues on through the three following chapters. Review the circumstances of this occasion. Mark particularly how it was that these discourses to his disciples were suggested, and you cannot but be deeply impressed with the unequalled elevation of his mind. Judas had just left him to go and consummate his treachery; and already the enemies of Jesus were getting ready to seize him. The thickening plot was beginning to give forth busy notes of preparation. The first thing that he thinks of is the Divine Glory to be revealed in his death. Then his thoughts turn to his disciples, and he forgets himself in his endeavours to sustain them. Not until after he had parted from them, and only two or three remained with him, and he was all but alone, at midnight, did the dark and suffering side of his near fate arrest his notice. Then for awhile, in the utter want of all human sympathy, his spirit sunk within him, and he fell prostrate on the earth in an agony of prayer for himself. Is it not natural that it should have been so? That an hour of weakness should have come is not surprising. The wonder is that it did not come sooner—that for so long a while after he was made to feel that death was close at hand, he should have kept off all selfish thoughts, and that, when the season of personal suffering did come, it was but of brief duration, and was succeeded by the sublimest self-possession, so that the last and most awful scene of his eventful career was the most glorious, glorious for his abiding serenity, for the perfect triumph of his piety and love.

Now the same naturalness appears in his baptism and temptation considered connectedly.

It is important to bear always in mind that Jesus of Nazareth was no blind, unconcerned, instrument in the hands of Providence, but was personally interested in his work as no other man ever was in his—that the power of exercising the miraculous gifts bestowed on him was consequent upon the elevation of his will. One of the great truths which he announced and to which he continually referred, is, that all the blessings of Heaven, all power, light, and life, all depend upon the condition of the individual will. “If any man will do the Divine will, he will know of my teaching, whether it be of God or not.” “He that doeth truth, cometh to the light.” “Every one that is of the truth, heareth my voice.” Why may we not look for an illustration of this great principle in the case of Jesus himself? Why may we not believe that, agreeably to the representation given in the foregoing chapter, his conviction of his destiny was not perfected until the moment when he ascended out of the water after having been baptised? And that then it followed naturally upon the previous state of his will. The view I take is simply this. Holy as his life had been before that hour, his baptism was the holiest season he had ever experienced. Then the energy of his purpose was the greatest. Never before had he been conscious of such high thoughts and aspirations, such determined resolves, as filled all his soul at that moment when, coming forth in a formal manner, in the eye of the world, through the rite of baptism, he made a solemn vow of self-consecration. A new experience, far surpassing all his previous experiences, was his; and he knew, as he had never known before, the infinite blessedness of a true spirit. Heaven was opened to him, and he heard a divine voice pronouncing him the be-

loved Son of God. He was pre-eminently single-hearted before, but then so vivid were the divine persuasions that sunk into his heart, that they were new and strange even to him. They had lifted him above himself. But from the nature of the human soul, dwelling in flesh, they could not last always at the same degree of intensity. Upon no spirit on earth does heaven in all its brightness dawn at once and abide for ever. The vision and the glory would overpower.

There are heavenly bodies so distant that they seem to be stationary, and we cannot discern their motion, and yet their velocity is the greatest. So was it with the Man of men. To us he appears to have always been from the first the perfect being that he was. And compared with all others, he was so. Still the Scriptures expressly say that he *grew* in favour with God, that he was made perfect through sufferings, that he learned obedience by the things that he suffered. If so, then the office which he filled had for its end, not only a world's salvation, but his own spiritual growth; and we are authorised from considerations of reason and human nature to infer that there was *progress* in the life of Jesus, and that the first visits of these divine thoughts, which daily become more habitual till they filled his whole heart and were the most active springs of his being, all but overpowered him. In the full conviction of divine favour at his baptism, there was a peace new and unutterable. But the joy and the glory of the office to which he then knew himself to be divinely summoned, brought with them the sense of its greatness and responsibility. The consciousness of his destiny was now settled and ineradicable. There it was, fixed for ever, thrilling, burning in his heart, and nothing was wanting to its confirmation. The irrevocable step had been taken. There

was no power in the universe that could make him otherwise than as he was. He had passed through a great crisis. Years of prayer and devout meditation had gone by, and daily and hourly his aspirations had been growing purer and mounting higher. Now he had been brought to concentrate the whole divine force of his being in a solemn act of the will, prompting him to a public vow of self-devotion. And this act had been followed, in the unchangeable truth of things, by unspeakable peace, the divine testimony, the voice of God. But then also the thought was brought home to him that now there was no retreat. The knowledge of himself could not be escaped. He could not un-essence his being. And, being what he was, what he knew himself to be, what a career was before him, what awful relations did he sustain to God and to the world! Well do we read, (in Mark) "And immediately he was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness." So profound was the sense he now had of his destiny that it gave him no rest. He recognised it as the voice of God, the impulse of the Holy Spirit; and it so moved him that he forsook the common ways of life, or rather was carried away by the force of his feelings into the deepest retirement, leaving the abodes of men, and wandering into the wilderness in communion with thoughts such as has never visited any other spirit.

The history represents the temptations by which he was assailed in the Desert, as the end and purpose for which he was led thither by the Spirit. But in the Scriptures, certain and inevitable consequences are very often represented as the results specially intended. Thus Jesus himself says, "I come not to bring peace but a sword." The purport of this declaration is

merely to state impressively how certain it was that discussions would ensue. They would as surely arise, and be as bitter and fierce, as if he had come expressly to produce them. He was impelled to seek the seclusion of the desert for relief from the pressure of the exalted thoughts which thronged in upon him. They rushed upon him almost to overwhelming, and drove him away from the haunts of men. And it is obvious that he went into the desert to seek, not temptation, but relief, support, strength. And the Spirit drove him thither not to tempt but to confirm him. But in the solitude of the wilderness, in the weakness of his body after long fasting, and the exhaustion of a mind borne down by a sense of things invisible, temptations arose so naturally and unavoidably, that in accordance with popular modes of speech, they are represented as the express and final cause of his being led into the wilderness, when they were only the incidental consequences.

The chief result of his temporary seclusion was an acquisition of great inward strength, and this may be regarded as the end and object of the Temptation. In his subsequent career, nothing is more impressive than the habitually calm and self-possessed deportment of Jesus. In intimate union with the Infinite, in the exercise of divine powers and the enjoyment of such gifts as had never before been bestowed on man, he maintains a uniform composure. He did indeed give way at times to the expression of strong emotion. But then these seasons of excited feeling were very brief. His uniform appearance is of a man quiet and composed. And we cannot but marvel at his calmness. We wonder that the sense of his own greatness, of his vast superiority to all around him, continually forced in the most imposing manner upon his notice, never disturbed

him—that he remained so simple and collected when thronged by multitudes, and when thousands of hearts were beating and thousands of eyes kindling at the wonders wrought by the touch of his hand and the word of his mouth, and he read his own greatness in the countenances of all men as in a mirror. But the Temptation explains the marvel in a degree. We find that it was not always so with him, that there was a time when he was well nigh overwhelmed by the consciousness of his unequalled destiny. When the spirit of truth and power descended upon him in new and abundant measure, as it did at his baptism, and the knowledge of himself as the chosen One, which had been gradually dawning on him, at last rose full upon his soul, and was made perfect and entire, wanting nothing, then was he impelled to forsake the world for awhile, to plunge into the desert, so exceeding was the weight of glory. Thither he fled, borne, “driven by the spirit” to ponder his extraordinary situation—to consider his high office, to calm and command his spirit. This was no ordinary task. It demanded effort. It was attended with struggles. And it was in the strictest course of nature that, in that wild solitude, with a physical frame worn down by fasting, the tempter should come to him. He not only gained the victory but he reaped lasting advantages therefrom. In this great struggle at the threshold of his career, he collected the strength that afterwards bore him divinely through the blackness that gathered round him. We perceive now that his subsequent composure was no constitutional insensibility, but the heavenly fruit of effort, of self-resistance and self-mastery.

‘The Tempter came to him.’ The temptations that assailed him were nowise different from those which

assail all other men. He was tempted as we are. But the evil thoughts that rose in his mind are represented as the proposition of an evil being. This representation is in accordance with the universal belief of the place and the age. Moral evil was attributed to the agency of a malignant spirit. It is of little moment how we suppose it to originate, if we only recognise its existence and influence. However it comes, whether out of our own nature, or by the instigation of a malignant being, its relation to the human will is the same, and "it has no more power over man than he chooses to give it." But there appears to be a peculiar significance in ascribing the temptations of Jesus to an evil spirit. To his holy nature, evil thoughts must have indeed appeared foreign, and we cannot wonder that they should have been regarded and represented as the suggestion of another, not indeed personally visible, but whispering in the ear of the soul. I have said that this representation was conformable to the belief of those times. Who shall presume to decide that it is not conformable to truth? The origin of evil is an unfathomed mystery. Clouds and darkness rest upon it. Were it not so repugnant to our feelings to believe that there are in the universe of God beings so inveterately opposed to him as to find delight in tempting and corrupting others, I know not why evil thoughts may not be attributed to malignant influences from without. So subtle, so active and so perilous are they, that, if we were indeed encompassed by viewless foes, our condition could not be more exposed. At all events, as I have just remarked, we cannot help perceiving a peculiar propriety in describing the temptation of Jesus as originated in this way.

The first temptation came in the shape of Hunger.

He had fasted forty days, subsisting on the scanty produce of the wilderness. 'Why,' said he to himself, or said the Tempter to him, 'why shouldst thou bear this painful craving for food? If thou art what thou knowest thyself to be, the Son of God, then use the power which belongs to thee as such, and convert these stones into loaves and satisfy thy hunger at once and without more ado.' But this suggestion is instantly silenced by the thought that bread, physical subsistence, is not man's only or chief want. Bread alone cannot sustain the life of a Son of God, which lies in something infinitely higher. 'If so,' we may suppose the blessed Saviour to have communed with himself—'if I am the Son of God, then a mere animal life is not the end of my being to which I am to devote my powers. The divine faculties and gifts of the Son of God are destined not for private and finite uses, but for vast and comprehensive purposes correspondent to gifts so great and rare. They have not been bestowed on me merely to support this perishing clay, and to exercise them for an object comparatively so worthless would be sacrilege. The life of the Son of God is not in the life of the body but in the life of the godlike soul, and that is sustained by the consciousness of being true to the Divine Will, the word written on the heart. No, I will not desecrate my power by putting it to a mean use. Better were it for me to perish than to forget my true destiny. My dependence is not on bread alone, or principally, but on the consciousness of being true to God.'

This temptation, in an infinite variety of forms, lays in wait for the children of men, and over what hosts does it gain the victory! In comparison with the other creatures on this globe, the meanest man that lives is verily a son of God. He is furnished with faculties, moral and intellectual, whereby he is qualified for god-

like aims and labours. But want—hunger, presses him, and instantly he uses the miraculous power he possesses over nature to furnish himself with bread, merely to feed and pamper the body. Not only the stones which lie around him, but the very bowels of the earth, the silver and the gold hidden there, he digs up to convert them into bread. He might do the work of a god in the world, spread abroad the glory of truth and virtue, cause knowledge and righteousness to abound, and transform the wilderness into the residence of angelic beings, but he is false to this high office. He perverts his great qualifications and toils only to supply his animal wants, and to multiply the means of self-gratification, and so he forgets that the true life of man does not consist in the bare continuance of his animal existence but in the wellbeing of the soul, whose sustenance is the consciousness of fidelity to the high and holy word of God. We defile our heaven-tempered weapons in the low strife of the senses, fighting only for bread. How often are the rarest talents desecrated in this way ! How often do we see men who possess powers fitting them to be the reformers and benefactors of thousands, sacrificing every thing for bread, or for the wealth and place which will secure bread enough and to spare ! Sons of God, they are insensible to the divine relation, to the lofty dignities and expectations that belong to the offspring of Heaven and the heirs of immortal possessions. “ ‘They must live,’ ” say they. But where is the necessity ? No mere life of any man is indispensable to the world. But it is necessary that every man, be he the highest or the lowest, should hold fast to his integrity—to the law of rectitude, that Word of God, even if instant death be the penalty. He must devote his powers, whatever they may be, to their true purpose, even if he die in the warfare. No life is so precious as

a death incurred through devotion to duty. The bloody and lifeless corpse of a true martyr hath in it an immortal life, and it will give life to him that only looks on it, whereas a body is dead, even though every pulse is beating and every nerve strung, if it contain not a true heart, listening ever to the divine word. So felt the Son of God in the wilderness. He knew his relation to God. And knowing that, he knew also that he had far better die instantly, miserably, for lack of bread, than live by the abuse of his sacred gifts, by putting them to a false end. "The Divine voice hath assured me," thought he, "that I am the Son of God. I will act then as becomes the Son of God, in a godlike manner, even if it be at the immediate cost of my life. I will be true to this great dignity, come what may."

"Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city and setteth him on a pinnacle of the Temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He will give his angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands they will bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Such is the record of another of his temptations.

Observe how, as in the former case, the tempter begins with, "If thou be the Son of God." This was the thought which recurred continually to the mind of Jesus. It was calculated to exalt him, and there was danger lest he should be too much elated by it. Let it be borne carefully in mind that at his Baptism, shortly before, this lofty and soul-thrilling conviction of his relation to God had been borne in upon him with new and all-satisfying force. Son of God! Ponder it, child of Mary, humble dweller in the town of Nazareth,

thou art the Son of God, and the special favour of the Infinite One resteth on thee ! In the first and exciting consciousness of this unrivalled dignity, elated for a moment by the height to which he was raised, he proposed to himself questionable trials of his power. His mind recurred most naturally to all those passages which the Jews considered, and which the Son of God was justified in regarding, as addressed to him. ‘If I am,’ thought he, ‘what a divine voice hath just assured me, the beloved Son of God, then hath he given his angels charge over me. Invisible protectors are mustered to be my guards and guides, to watch over my every step. I cannot stumble over the meanest stone but that unseen hands will be extended to hold me up.* Could he avoid a transient elation of mind at the thought of this special protection—of angelic hosts attending his steps ? And then the thought arose in his mind of trying his invisible guardians. For the pleasure of being instantly surrounded and borne up by angelic messengers, “why,” he asked, “why may I not go and throw myself from one of the pinnacles of the Temple ?” In imagination—in the spirit, he stood there and saw himself encircled by an angel company hovering around, and ready to save him from all harm, and the delight of being thus protected suggested itself to his mind. Here was the tempter creeping on him under the guise of vanity and self-display. But he instantly penetrates and resists the evil. Another passage of Scripture

* Is it a conjecture altogether groundless, that this particular passage of the Old Testament, “*He will give his angels charge over thee ; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone,*” was suggested by his having at that moment misstepped, or at least by the spot where he stood. Exhausted by fasting, he was wandering, lost in meditation, in a rugged, stony wilderness. To a spirit so deeply and habitually devout, the meanest incident was suggestive. At all events, the fact that *stones* are mentioned in both the first two temptations is a coincidence that arrests notice.

occurs to him and exposes the error—"Thou shalt not tempt (try) the Lord thy God." And he sees the irreverence of using the privileges given him that he might act the part of a Son of God, merely to gratify a vain curiosity, a selfish vanity. The Divine Providence is too sacred to be relied on for any but sacred ends. God sends his angels, not to minister to the caprices and vanity of man, but to aid him in the achievement of heavenly labours; and if we seek to avail ourselves of their ministrations to gratify ourselves rather than to serve God, we do it at our peril, and are chargeable with the impiety of thinking to induce God to do evil, to give up his perfect will for the sake of our corrupt passions. There is an Eastern story which relates how a man, having obtained knowledge of a magical spell whereby he could summon certain genii to his service, in his haste to avail himself of supernatural aid, forgot a part of the charm, so that when the genii appeared, instead of obeying his behest, they drew forth instruments of violence from under their robes, and, having beaten him till he was lifeless, vanished, carrying with them the talisman which alone they obeyed. So is it with the means and opportunities which God has placed at our disposal, and which may be regarded as angels, appointed to be our servants. Summon them aright, and they will lend all needed assistance, but trifle with them, put them on a derogatory errand, and they will rend and tear us. This was no strange temptation then that assailed the Son of God. It has lain in ambush for man from the beginning of the world. Whether guardian spirits are set to watch over us, we say not. But our own powers, and the powers of nature made obedient to our will, are so many ministering angels. In these we possess exalted privileges, and are continu-

ally tempted to employ them for the gratification of our self-love, merely to display our power, to indulge our vanity or pride. How rarely do we recollect with Jesus that our opportunities are the sacred gifts of Heaven, entrusted to us for the fulfilment of God's will, not ours. Prone to put them to our own selfish and idle uses, we do, in a manner, tempt or try the Lord our God. We act as if we thought to induce him to forget and suspend his perfect purposes for our low sakes—to tempt him to join and aid us with his angels in promoting our vain ends, in doing evil.

“Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” It is not necessary to suppose that these various temptations occurred in immediate succession. There may have been considerable intervals, and they may have been suggested in various forms. But these which are recorded were the chief. First came Hunger, the representative of the animal nature. The tempter resisted in this shape, next appealed to a less sensual, or less obviously sensual, feeling—to the pleasing idea of gratified self-importance. Again baffled, he returns once more, and seeks to conquer through ambition, the great desire of universal possession and conquest, ‘the last infirmity of noble minds.’ ‘I am the Son of God,’ said Jesus, ‘This I know. I am so by the irreversible appointment of Heaven. I cannot but be what I am. My bosom heaves with the consciousness of greatness

and power. I have the ability to make myself master of the world, the destined field and sphere of my office. Why should I not will it? In the glow of his imagination, earth lay at his feet, and all its magnificent empires passed in review before him. He had only to say the word and surrender himself to this object, and all would be his. At once he might ascend above all conquerors and kings. But he rejects the idea with indignant emphasis, for it demanded the utter renunciation of the only true object of worship. He knew that his gifts were rare and great because they qualified him to serve the Lord his God, and Him only, as God had never been served before. 'Away,' he does in effect exclaim, 'away with the impious thought! I can possess myself of earthly kingdoms only by a devotion to my own glory, which would be a gross violation of the express, written law, which binds the creature to serve not himself but his God.'

When he had resisted the allurements of ambition, there was no avenue left by which evil thoughts could approach him. Accordingly we read that then the devil left him. Matthew and Mark add, "that angels came and ministered unto him." The term, 'angel,' was by no means synonymous, in the Hebrew use of the word, with a visible, personal, shape. Whatever appeared at the moment to be an instrument in the hands of Providence was considered and spoken of as an angel. There was great truth in this mode of thought and speech. All things are the angels of Heaven to an eye that looks on all things in a religious light and from the true point. To a spirit, filled with the elevated consciousness of duty discharged, and self subdued, the universe puts on aspects of glory and loveli-

ness, and no heaven, thronged with countless hosts of seraphs and sounding with celestial music, is one half so beautiful as this very world, in which we live, to such a spirit. When the great struggle was over and the tempter had fled, and the bosom of Jesus, no longer darkened by evil shadows, was filled with the serene triumph of moral victory and endowed with new force wrought out by the recent strife, then the ineffable light of God beaming within, irradiated every thing around him, and the desert smiled, and the sun grew brighter in the heavens, and grace and beauty invested the meanest things, until they overflowed with a divine presence and spirit, and seemed to be living, speaking, ministers of God. In this divine frame he quitted the desert, and "returned in the power of the spirit to Galilee."

There remains only one question to be noticed. How came the particulars of our Saviour's temporary sojourn in the wilderness to be known? There is only one answer. They must have been communicated by himself to some one or to all his disciples. We have no account of his return from the desert. Much is obviously omitted at this point of the history. His disappearance for forty days and upwards must have awakened some curiosity, if not anxiety, among his kindred and friends. And when sooner or later he informed them of what had passed in the wilderness, the account he gave was so interesting that they never deemed it of sufficient importance to state the circumstances under which this communication was made to them. They have told us simply what they had gathered from him. It could not have occurred to them as a matter of any moment that their listeners or readers

would be anxious to know how and when they learned from him the circumstances of the temptation. Much of the private intercourse which he had with those connected with him, with his mother and the favourite disciple especially, was not likely to be made a matter of public record, particularly while there was so much else to be told of a nature interesting and important to all.

CHAPTER V.

THE COMING.

"In teaching or enforcing truth, the language of error may be used in order powerfully to affect the feelings; because it has associations with it which no other language will suggest. Such use of it implies no assent to the error on which it is founded. He who employs the epithets 'diabolical,' or 'fiendish,' affords from that circumstance alone no reason to suppose, that he believes in the existence of devils or fiends. There is much language of the same character. We still borrow many expressions from imaginary beings of ideal beauty and grace, from fairies and sylphs, beings whose real existence was once believed. We have no reluctance to use words derived from the false opinions concerning witchcraft, possession, and magic. But this fact has been disregarded in reasoning from the language of Christ. Expressions founded upon the conceptions of the Jews, and used by him because no other modes of speech would have so powerfully affected their minds, have been misunderstood as intended to convey a doctrine taught by himself."

NORTON.

FROM the meditations and conflicts of the wilderness, Jesus came forth among men, 'in the power of the spirit,' announcing the approach of the Heavenly Reign, and accompanying the annunciation with miracles of mercy and words of unwonted authority, the rumour of which spread rapidly throughout Galilee, the country where he first appeared, producing a great sensation, "and he was glorified of all."

Here was no teacher appointed by men, no member of an ancient and regular body, observing established rules, and wearing a time-honoured badge. He pre-

sented himself before men, not in the name of any human authority, but in the power of a divine spirit; and had he been elected by the world's acclamation, he could not have borne more impressively the air of a man having an unquestionable right to speak. Not the child and pupil of institutions was he, but their reformer and creator, whom teachers and priesthoods of countless names and orders were to honour as their Head.

His method of proceeding as the world's king and leader elect, of God to fill a God's office, is most remarkable, and deserves the closest attention. It is as natural as it is original.

It is common to speak of the Christian scheme, as if the founder of our religion had pursued his great work with a constant and formal reference to a previously devised plan. The Christian records give no countenance to this idea. Nothing can appear more unsystematic than the whole proceeding of Jesus. Although general principles are directly deducible from the language he uttered, and his language itself is not unfrequently general in its form, yet, as I have had occasion more than once to observe, he almost always spoke and acted with reference to local and particular circumstances. Even when he expressed himself in universal terms, and appeared to be enunciating abstract principles, there is reason to think that this very mode of speaking was suggested by some special instance, to which his language particularly refers. His utterances seem, almost without an exception, to have been unpremeditated and occasional. No inference, however, unfavourable either to the comprehensiveness or the consistency of his purposes, is to be drawn from the absence of all traces of system in his ministry. For although it may at first sight appear to intimate that

he taught and toiled without law or order, it really results from the very clearness and greatness of his aims. When, in any department, whether of art, literature, politics, or religion, an individual formally announces a theory, and keeps it industriously in sight, there is always produced the impression of something circumscribed, narrow. Whereas the highest achievements of man—the productions of genius seem always at first sight, erratic and lawless. But when closely studied, they exhibit the greatest perfection of purpose, illustrate the most comprehensive laws of nature, and show that, either consciously or unconsciously, there has been the finest observance of method. The wildness of genius, as it has been termed, has turned out to be the purest wisdom. What has appeared a random impulse has in the end tended to demonstrate consummate policy. “Where the true poet seems most to recede from humanity, he will be found the truest to it. From beyond the scope of nature if he summon possible existences, he subjugates them to the law of her consistency. He is beautifully loyal to that sovereign directress even when he appears most to betray and desert her.”

It proves nothing against the divine authority of Christ—on the contrary it directly attests the perfection and unity of his purpose, that he proposed no system, carefully framed and set forth with logical precision. Were there any appearance of this kind, it would be impossible to avoid an impression of narrowness, let the terms in which his scheme might be announced, be ever so general and unqualified. We should see the difference and the contrast between a plan thus conceived and followed and “the infinite complexities of real life,” between his system and the boundless system of nature, and an air of artificialness would be more or less discernible in the former. The

very idea of a scheme, as I have said, implies something mapped out and bounded. But as the case actually stands, we see no traces of system in the ministry of Jesus; to the ever-changing details and relations of life, to the unnumbered occasions of Providence, he adjusted himself, his words and works, without a moment's hesitation, and with the most admirable effect. The coincidence between his spirit and the great laws of life and providence is an impressive attestation to the truth of his purpose. It shows that his life and work were conducted upon a method so perfectly identical with the grand method of nature, that he was scarcely conscious of it. He laid down no formal and elaborate plan of benevolence, but his whole being lived, moved, and wrought, in a sphere of universal love. This was his element, in which his affections flourished with that silent and unconscious ease which accompanies all genuine and healthy vitality. His design is no where minutely defined or laboriously developed; not because he had no definite object, but because it exceeded the power of the understanding to comprehend, and the resources of language to describe it. Still the heart may feel its greatness and consistency; and, although it cannot be fully set forth in words, like the great system of nature, it may be partially penetrated.

It may be stated generally that he came to awaken the world to its deepest wants and to supply them; in other words, to communicate the knowledge of the only Living and the True, the unsleeping Witness, the swift and just Judge, and to make this knowledge an active principle in the heart of man, the hope and fountain of eternal life. His purpose may be defined by an endless variety of terms, according to the ever-

changing modes of human thought and speech. In his day and in the place where he uttered himself there existed a deep and wide expectation of an approaching, heaven-founded empire—of a deliverer and guide to be raised up and consecrated by God. This form of thought modified the speech of Jesus, as, in whatever age he had appeared, his mode of expressing the messages he was sent to deliver, would have been affected by the prevalent modes of that age. Accordingly, appearing as he did among the Jews, among a people cherishing certain fixed ideas, he spake in terms corresponding thereto, and represented the infinite good, which he was sent to impart, under the image of a heaven-anointed king and a divine kingdom, then close at hand. It is the aim of the present chapter to explain this mode of speech, what is meant by the coming of the kingdom, or, which is the same thing, of the Son of Man.

Conscious of the fulness and authority of divine grace and truth, knowing himself to be born and qualified to answer not only the expectation of his country but the desire of all nations, the Man of Nazareth yet did not declare himself formally and in words as the expected Christ. On the contrary he took special care to avoid a verbal avowal of his office. His conduct in this respect was very remarkable. When the disciples of John came and put the question directly to him, 'Art thou he that should come or must we look for another?' he did not return a direct answer, but bade them go and tell John what they had seen and heard. When, upon questioning his disciples, he discovered that they believed him to be the Christ, he charged them to keep their faith to themselves, to speak to no one of him as Jesus the Messiah. Again, when possessed or deranged persons met him surrounded by throngs of people, the

object of universal wonder, and accosted him at once as the Christ, thus expressing outright what the people generally were beginning to surmise, he commanded them to keep silence.

That no personal considerations, no apprehensions for his own safety, prompted this course, is impressively manifest. His fearlessness is not less conspicuous than his benevolence, and appears most strikingly in his bearing towards the false teachers and priests who ruled the people as with a rod of iron, and whose malignity it was most perilous to provoke. He spake out publicly in terms of stern condemnation, exposing their hypocrisy. He threw wide open those whited sepulchres, fearless of the demons that haunted them, and that were already plotting there to confound his pure light. At the very beginning of his career, he placed himself in open and uncompromising opposition to those who pretended to be the sole interpreters of the Law and examples of its influence, when he declared that the hollow, formal righteousness which the Scribes and Pharisees enjoined and practised was utterly worthless, that a far different righteousness was indispensable to admission into the divine kingdom. It is needless to adduce instances of his fearlessness. His whole life and death show that he was never trammelled by personal apprehensions. He went and sat down with men of the lowest character, and of no character, and shrunk not from the opprobrium of such company. There is one incident that shows so strikingly how little he regarded opinion that I may be justified in making a particular reference to it.

Once as he was on his way to Jerusalem, attended by a vast and constantly increasing crowd, he passed through Jericho. In this city there dwelt a man, Zaccheus by name, who held the odious office of a tax

gatherer. Diminutive in person, he was unable on account of the throng to obtain a sight of Jesus, the object of universal curiosity, and he ran on in advance of the multitude and climbed into a tree. , Probably Jesus had heard something of him, or his attention may have been attracted to the tax gatherer by the people who accompanied him. But however this may have been, when he reached the foot of the tree into which Zaccheus had climbed, he stopped, and, looking up, bade him come down, for he was going to visit him at his house, and the publican descended with joyful alacrity. How impressive is the disregard of popular impressions and judgments manifested by Jesus in thus publicly selecting for particular notice out of all that crowd, not the wealthiest and most respectable, but a person disliked, despised, one, it may be, whose diminutive appearance suggested mean thoughts and the ridicule of people! Cannot the reader enter into the feelings of those, who, on witnessing this incident, exclaimed with contemptuous wonder, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner!" He was the last man to be restrained from speaking or acting by personal considerations. The care, then, with which he avoided a public declaration of himself as the Christ, even if we should be at a loss to explain it, is not to be imputed to fear. But it does admit of a full and satisfactory explanation.

He would not announce himself, nor suffer others to announce him as the Christ, because he was not the Christ that his countrymen were looking for. The personage they were expecting under this title was to be distinguished principally for the splendour of his outward appearance, for the political power he was to obtain and exercise. Jesus pretended to no character of this kind, and he saw that it would produce a false

impression were he to assume the title of Messiah. He studiously avoided giving the least countenance to the idea that he was a secular Prince. He perceived how powerfully his miracles had wrought on the general mind, producing the suspicion that he was the Christ. So great was the excitement that he was compelled once and again to withdraw himself from public notice—to retire to the wilderness. He saw how false were the popular notions of the Messiah. The people, taking hastily up the impression that he was that personage, would have insisted upon making a king of him, or upon his refusal, would have torn him to pieces in the fury of their disappointment. Difficult and perilous was the path that lay before him. While he could not avoid producing excitement, it was necessary that it should not rise beyond a certain point. A single word from him declaratory of his office as the Christ, would have been understood as a signal for the unfurling of banners, and the mustering of armed hosts. He aimed therefore to correct and enlarge the popular views of the coming kingdom. This was the task to which he gave himself. Avoiding the assumption of a title or name which would have inevitably produced an erroneous impression, he went about, claiming, not in words but in fact, all the authority of the Anointed of Heaven, speaking, acting, bearing himself on all occasions, and in all respects, even in this very avoidance of the title of Messiah, in a manner conformable to the true idea of a Heaven-sent, furnishing at every step decisive credentials to the truth of his claims.

The only title which he took was, "the Son of Man," an appellation of a general character, by no means identical with "the Christ." It was a favourite title of the ancient prophets, of Ezekiel particularly. Most natural was it for those, who, like the old prophets,

cherished an overpowering sense of Divine Majesty, and contemplated themselves not with reference to human standards but in their relation as creatures before their Creator, to eschew all artificial terms of designation, all conventional titles. They felt themselves to be men, only men, frail creatures of the dust, children of mortality. And this they felt most deeply. God recognised and addressed them, so they felt, simply as men; and the word of the Lord came to the prophet, to whose awe-struck vision, only God and his own mortality were present, saying "Son of Man!" But not to dwell on the origin and significance of this phrase, I remark that the Hebrews used the term indicative of the filial relation in a peculiar manner. The phrases, "sons of men," and "children of men," abound in the Scriptures, and are evidently synonymous with "men," simply, although somewhat more emphatic.

The title of Son of Man was adopted by Jesus, partly as expressive of a prophetic character, and partly as a mere term of designation. He was the object of particular and universal attention, the topic of conversation throughout the whole country. The rumour of his miracles ran through the land, kindling the minds of all men. In public and private, wherever men met, there was a talking about the strange Man who had appeared in Galilee, the Man, who had visited such and such places, who had healed one or another of an inveterate disease, or given sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, and had uttered wonderful words. So possessed were all men's minds with the thought of him, so exclusively was he the one only man whom all were thinking and talking of, that it became needless for him to characterise himself as any other than merely "the Man," or "Son of Man." "Have you seen the man?" "Have you heard what the man has just been

doing?" Questions of this kind, we may suppose, were continually put when friends and acquaintances met. And it was unnecessary, I repeat, that he should be designated by any title more definite than "the Man," or "the Son of Man," because every one's thought, engrossed with the idea of him, supplied the rest. When the Man was spoken of, who else could be meant, but the man upon whose appearance and works all were musing.

A somewhat similar use of language prevails in some places with reference to the Supreme, who is designated by the simple pronoun 'He.' But it is not any local trait. It is a natural mode of speaking. Upon the occurrence of any sudden calamity, a mind of a devout cast, fully and habitually possessed with the thought of God, instead of saying, 'God's will be done!' might naturally, and with more emphasis, exclaim, 'His will be done!' the expression implying that there is no being thought of, or to be thought of, but One. So with like pertinence the title of 'Son of Man,' or its synonyme, 'the Man,' was applied by Jesus to himself. The first occasion, upon which Matthew records him to have used it, was when one offered to follow him wherever he might go. Jesus replied. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." As if he had said, 'You are sadly deceived if you expect to obtain any thing by following me. The meanest creatures are provided for, but the man whom all are talking of and all are glorifying, the man upon whom universal attention is fixed, knows not where he shall rest his head.' At another time, when alone with his disciples, he inquired, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" In other words, 'Whom do men

say that I, the Man, am, the Man that all are talking about, that am attended by such crowds ?

The title, thus understood partly as indicative of a prophetic office and partly as a mere term of designation, was applied also by Jesus to the Messiah, but it did not necessarily amount to an identification of himself with that personage. Jesus was the man about whom universal curiosity was excited. The Messiah was the man who was to appear. The former was the man present, the latter the man looked for. Jesus did not deny the identity of the two, nor did he directly assert it. He left it to his listeners to draw the true conclusion, assisting them as much as possible by describing as definitely as words could do it, the true character and glory of the Christ, and by manifesting that character and glory in his own life. When he sent forth his disciples to announce the coming of the heavenly kingdom, he said unto them, "Verily I say unto you, ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of man be come," i. e., before you have fulfilled the commission upon which I send you, the Son of Man, the man whom all are waiting for, the Messiah, will appear. In fact, had the disciples but only known it, the Messiah had already come, the great revolution, signified by the 'coming,' had already commenced. But although they believed Jesus to be that man who was looked for, still they did not consider him as having come, the grand coming had not, to their minds, yet taken place. Again on another occasion, he said, "Nevertheless when the Son of Man cometh, will he find faith on the earth ?" i. e. 'When the Man cometh whom the whole nation is so anxiously waiting for, with the hope of whose appearance all hearts burn, will he find men prepared to believe in

him?" Let me repeat this statement. It is important to be kept in mind. Jesus speaks of himself and he speaks of the Messiah as 'the Son of Man;' but with a difference. He was the man who commanded present attention. The Christ was the man whom all were expecting, the man that was to come. Jesus knew that the two were one and the same. But he did not explicitly declare himself as the Christ, except on special occasions, because he could not avoid seeing, that, if the people were unmoved by that most powerful evidence which all that he said and did gave to his identity with Christ, the mere verbal declaration of himself as the anointed One would produce error and mischief and nothing else. If they were unable to feel the divine power of his works, it was obviously because their minds were corrupted by that vision of worldly magnificence and military glory of which the name of the Christ was the symbol; and the assumption of this title would only have inflamed, it never could have chastened, their earthly imaginations.

These observations, I cannot help thinking, lead to the elucidation of a portion of the New Testament, involved in much obscurity. Expositors and theologians have written much about the first and second coming of Christ. The Christian world almost universally look for a personal re-appearance of the Man of Nazareth, and there appears to be much in the language of the Scriptures to justify this expectation. But let us go back to the age of Jesus and endeavour to see the case as it stood.

It was the divine peculiarity of the religion of Moses that it recognised the progressive nature of man, by pointing steadily into the future. While the other

nations of ancient times placed the golden age in the past, the Hebrews looked for an era yet to come, and destined to surpass in glory and in good all that had gone before. They believed that their dispensation, proud as they were of it, was to be succeeded by another far better and more divine, to which the religion of Moses was only preliminary. The prophets who appeared among this people from age to age were men who, imbibing a more than ordinary measure of the spirit of the national faith, became qualified to receive divine inspirations. They predicted, in glowing language, the future good. But while they saw that it was to consist in the increase of righteousness, they believed that the great blessing was to be realised through their own nation, and by its eminence and power as a nation. There was to be established a grand Jewish empire, with a heaven-anointed king at its head. Such was the form which the Hebrew hope gradually assumed in the course of ages. There sprang up and prevailed many opinions concerning the forms, institutions and concomitants of the kingdom that was to come. But all believed that it would be introduced and established by a man sent from God, clothed with extraordinary powers, all the insignia of the vicegerent of Heaven. This looking for the advent of an inspired man was sanctioned not only by the prophets, but by the reason and nature of things. The whole analogy of nature and providence bids man look for the fulfilment of his best hopes through man. In all things man is the mediator standing between heaven and earth. Would that now-a-days, instead of waiting for the supreme good to be manufactured by institutions and governments, the world placed its heart and hope on man alone under God, that it panted and prayed for the advent of true men ! How might such

a hope, inspired by reason, nature, and providence, tend to its own fruition! This natural expectation was cherished with the greatest ardour among the Jews, but, although consecrated by religious faith, it was contracted and debased by narrow prejudices and earth-born passions. It was not a man, a man inspired to sympathise with and to supply the deepest wants of man, but a prince that they longed for, a political deliverer, a fountain of national honour and renown. The galling oppression of Rome exasperated their worst passions, and they prayed for a Christ to avenge their wrongs and lead them in triumph over their foes. Not a guiding Mind, not a loving Heart, did they wait for, but a red right Arm. Their chief and darling idea of the Messiah was of a conqueror who would found a magnificent empire, administered indeed in righteousness and the fear of Jehovah, but still an empire of visible grandeur.

Such was the faith of the period at which Jesus of Nazareth appeared. He did not declare himself the Messiah. He assumed no visible pomp or authority, but went about every where announcing that the great kingdom was nigh, that 'the Son of Man,' the Anointed; the Man, to whom the hope of the nation so fondly pointed, was at hand. Anxiously expected as he was, the Christ, he declared, would come at a moment and in a way wholly unexpected, and would find few prepared to recognise and receive him. And in so saying, he stated an actual, present fact, could his hearers only have understood it. The chief topic of the discourses of Jesus was the divine kingdom that was drawing nigh. The manner of its introduction, its progress, influence, and laws, he aimed to shadow forth to the minds of his countrymen, dimmed by bigoted prejudice and selfish passions, in various similitudes and

parables. It would come, he said, not with pomp and outward observation. It was an invisible empire, and men would not be able to say, Lo, here! or, Lo, there! for it was within. He describes its progress as gradual, like the process of vegetation, 'first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear,' or like the growth of a minute seed or the influence of leaven. One of his first and most remarkable declarations is that not the proud and warlike, but the lowly-minded, not the revengeful, but they who were prepared to suffer all things for the sake of right, returning blessings and prayers for curses, were the true and rightful heirs of rank and honour in the coming kingdom. It was all but impossible, he once observed to the exceeding amazement of those who heard him, for the rich to enter that kingdom. Its thrones would be filled by those who surrendered all things, houses, lands, and the dearest treasures of life, for the sake of the world's regeneration. When asked who shall be the greatest in the kingdom, he replied, that no one could so much as enter it, unless he put on the docile temper of a child. He declared with solemn explicitness that the divine kingdom would be filled with multitudes flocking from all quarters, while those who imagined themselves the heirs of that glory would be excluded. When one among his hearers, unable to repress his feelings, burst forth with the exclamation, 'Happy those who shall sit down in the kingdom of God!' Jesus instantly related a parable of a man who made a great feast and invited many, and at the fit hour sent to request their attendance, but they refused to come, thus teaching that those who were first invited to enter the glorious kingdom, would be unwilling to accept the invitation when all was prepared for their reception. Again upon another occasion, he repressed more strikingly the

thoughtless hopes of the people when, as he was approaching Jerusalem, and a vast and excited throng attended him, and the impression was spread abroad that the great revolution was immediately to commence and the kingdom to be ushered in, he uttered those other parables by which he taught that none would be permitted to share in the blessings and honours of the expected reign, who were unprepared to render a faithful account of their respective trusts.

From these various representations, considered in connection with the whole tenor of his language and his whole manner of life, simple, devoid of all show, self-denying and laborious, we perceive that the idea of the kingdom, which possessed his mind and which he lived and died to advance, was a spiritual idea. The state of things which he portrays by all these similitudes was a new condition of the human soul, not primarily a new arrangement of man's outward condition, but a renovation of the inner life. The Jews all believed that the kingdom of the Messiah would be distinguished by the increase and prevalence of righteousness. But of this they thought comparatively little. The moral aspect of the coming dispensation was but dimly discerned and lightly thought of. Its relative value was not suspected. The visible splendours of the kingdom, its riches and honours—these, to the popular mind, occupied the foreground of the great picture painted upon "the cloud-curtain of the future." Jesus aimed to teach that the true glory of the coming dispensation, consisted not in these but in the moral good it would bring and illustrate. By various figures and parables he sought to fix attention and excite curiosity, and, attracting his countrymen to study out his meaning, he drew off their minds from worldly visions, and gave them some insight into the spiritual features of

the heavenly kingdom, its inward life rather than its visible form.

It may be thought, by the way, that his labours availed very little. But the reverse was the fact. Always, from the foundation of the world, man has looked to the outward to bless his hopes. Against this disposition, heightened and rendered inveterate by the peculiar force of Jewish prejudices, Jesus had to contend. And when we consider what resistance these offered to his divine teachings, we can only wonder at the measure of his success. Judge of him as you please, the simple historical fact you cannot dispute. He has changed the condition of the world. No life has wrought like his upon mankind. In the briefest space, he so moulded by his influence eleven individuals, that from the meanest sphere they were raised to be Apostles, Martyrs, the world's guides and regenerators. But not to wander from the subject in hand, by aiming to enlarge and spiritualise the popular conceptions of the nature of the kingdom, he was, in effect, writing out in divine characters, the credentials of his own authority. Were the lowly, and self-sacrificing, and persecuted, the highest and most distinguished in the kingdom of Heaven? Then was not he, so pre-eminently humble and self-denying, the Anointed King himself?

So far there is but little difficulty. But while we have so much reason to conclude that the idea which Jesus had of the kingdom was perfectly spiritual, there is language of his recorded which does not at first sight accord with this conclusion. He speaks of the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven and attended by hosts of angels, of a time when the Son of Man shall be seated on a glorious throne. He appears to have had in view a definite event, to occur in that generation,

an event which he represents as the coming of the Son of Man. And while he confessed that he knew not—that God alone knew the precise hour when it would take place, he enumerates many particulars which would occur coincidently with it, such as the utter destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem, and the overthrow of the Jewish nation. Then, he says, the Son of Man will come with all the holy angels, and before him shall be gathered all nations, and he will separate the good from the wicked, and distribute everlasting awards. He declared moreover that there were some present while he was speaking, who should not taste of death before they saw the glorious coming of the Son of Man. From these representations it was inferred by his disciples that Jesus would personally re-appear within that generation, and raise the dead, that the earth would pass away, and an immortal state immediately succeed. And to this very day, it is almost universally believed among Christians that Jesus will appear again in the clouds of Heaven to judge the world in person and distribute the awards of Eternity.

Let us endeavour to enter more fully into the mind of Jesus. The kingdom of Heaven, which was popularly conceived of as a visible empire, was in the view of Jesus, as we have seen, a new moral condition, a regeneration of the heart of man. This was his grand leading idea. The coming of the kingdom, therefore, signified the diffusion of this idea. Just in the degree in which the supreme importance of inward holiness was felt, and the life of the soul was recognised as the highest good, the kingdom of God had come. The first annunciation of Jesus was, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." It was at hand, for in his own bosom it had already come. There God reigned supreme, and angels dwelt, and the ineffable peace of

heaven was diffused. The heavenly kingdom then was near. And as his influence was extended, the kingdom was extended. It was coming. The coming of the kingdom necessarily involved the coming of the Messiah, the head and founder of the kingdom, and was synonymous with it. The essence and power of his coming was to be looked for, then, in the extension and deepening of his spiritual influence. Not in a personal presence, but in the action and force of a living, Son of God's spirit did "the coming" consist.

There is a remarkable passage that throws great light on our subject. "I will not leave you comfortless," said Jesus to his personal disciples, just before his death, "I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. Then ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." Upon his making these declarations one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" Jesus answered, "If a man loveth me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." Could language be more explicit? He who acts out the commandments of Jesus from the heart, elevates and purifies his moral sense. He discerns the moral significance of things. He sees the Father and the Son—they come to him not personally, in visible shapes, but they are manifested in the brightness of their moral being, present to his heart. They not only come to him, but they are in him and he is in them. A far more intimate acquaintance, a far closer and more

inspiring union takes place, than could be formed by mere personal intercourse. The case admits of impressive illustration. There have been men in the world who have mingled with their fellow men. Their personal appearance has been familiar to many eyes. And yet not until they have vanished, have they come close to men. Once, they were seen, and their voices were heard, but none understood them, and only their outward forms, 'the dust and shadow' of their being, were taken note of. Intellectually, morally, they have been invisible, and only in death, when they have died perhaps by the violent hands of a misjudging world, do they come to be known. Then their worth has been recognised—the living force that was in them, that made them what they were, has been felt intimately, in the hearts of mankind. Then have they come, through the force of their characters and works. So was it with Jesus of Nazareth. Personally present on earth, so near to men bodily that their eyes might see, and their hands touch him, yet he was not known. The spirit that was in him and that made him the being that he was, was as truly hidden,—separate from them, as if he were thousands of miles distant—beyond the boundaries of time. Knowing himself to be the Anointed of heaven, bringing unspeakable good to men, he saw that he was not understood or known. He cared not to attract their bodily eyes to his person, but to enter their heart of hearts and diffuse light and blessedness there. There it was that he longed to come and dwell and reign. But the bitter prejudices of his country prevented his access to the human soul. Jewish pride was as a wall of stone in his way. This was the great obstacle to his coming. He knew that the godlike purpose, for which he lived and was to die, must sooner or later be fulfilled, that he would reach

the hearts of men, and that the stubborn bigotry of his countrymen would be broken down. They had arrayed themselves in their madness against the irreversible will and truth of God, and they must be ground into powder by the steady and onward course of Providence. Foreseeing the utter overthrow of the Jewish nation, how natural was it that he should represent his coming as coincident with that grand national catastrophe. Then the great and immediate obstacle in the way of his progress would be removed. Then the path would be made straight before him and the mountain would be levelled, and he would come in triumph and great glory. Not that his coming was in fact fully consummated then with the cessation of Jewish hostility. Oh! no. Even now, after the lapse of centuries, Jesus is yet to come to the fulness of his power. The sun of righteousness as yet shines but afar off like a tremulous star. Still, when we go back and place ourselves in imagination at the side of Jesus, and strive to see things as he saw them, we perceive how perfectly natural it was that he should regard and represent the annihilation of Jewish opposition as equivalent to his coming. The tremendous prejudices, which stood in array before him like a steel host, these naturally appeared to him as the sole enemies of truth, the only obstacles to its progress. When they were crushed, then the way would be clear before him. Then would the Son of Man come.

It may still be urged that his disciples evidently looked for his personal re-appearance, and that, soon; and his own language on some occasions seems to have justified the expectation that the Messiah would come in the clouds of Heaven, attended by angelic hosts.

Now in order to understand those declarations of

his which seem to authorise this expectation, and to trace the error of his disciples to its true source, it is of the utmost importance, in the examination of his language, to distinguish carefully between what was peculiar and original in him, and what belonged to the people and the time. It must be kept fully in view that, before Jesus appeared, the Jews were filled with the expectation of a Prophet and Prince, to come in extraordinary glory and with supernatural demonstrations of power. This was the fixed and universal persuasion. So completely had it taken possession of their minds that, as miracles could not shake, neither could they strengthen it. It admitted neither of increase nor confirmation. The obstinacy, with which they held out against the armies of Rome at the siege of the Holy City, revealed the immense depth of this impression. It had grown into them and become a part of their nature. When Jesus therefore spake of the Son of Man's coming in power and great glory, and with celestial signs and attendants, and being seated on a glorious throne, he did not (so far as this language was concerned) present any new idea or produce any new impression. His hearers believed all this already, and they wanted not the word of man or of angel to confirm it.

But why, you ask, did he use language which represented such erroneous impressions in the popular mind? Because, after all, notwithstanding the false, outward meaning connected with it, it was true, true in a far deeper and more comprehensive sense than the people imagined. It was true that the Son of Man was coming, although not in person, yet in the penetrating power of his spirit, not with a glory to be seen by the eye, not with signs in the upper firmament, yet with a far brighter glory and with more celestial signs.

When on one occasion, the Jews boasted that their ancestors had eaten bread from heaven, alluding to the manna in the wilderness, which was supposed to have fallen from the sky, Jesus replied, "Moses did not give you true heavenly bread. He who giveth up his life for the sustenance of the world, he is the true bread of Heaven." Here the manner of his thinking is shown. Thus the language which he borrowed from the popular phraseology of the day, when he speaks of the coming of the Son of Man, was true in a far more interesting and important sense than was commonly supposed.

And besides, in immediate connection with this phraseology, he expressed truths which were fitted to enlarge the popular notions, and interpret the popular language, and help his hearers to understand it in a new and better sense. The most imposing description of the coming of the Son of Man is found in the 25th chapter of Matthew. It commences, "When the Son of Man shall come in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then will he sit upon the throne of his glory. And before him will be gathered all nations, &c." And then it goes on to declare that the honours and blessings of the Messiah's reign would be conferred upon those who are devoted to offices of kindness and mercy, and who do good to the least and lowest of their brethren, while the wrath of the Messiah would be poured upon those who shut their hearts against the wretched and forsaken. They would be driven away with shame and punishment. Now it was not the design of this representation to inform the Jews that the Messiah would come in glory with attendant angels and be seated on a throne with all nations at his feet. These things the Jews already knew and believed with confirmation strong as Holy Writ. This language communicated no new information. It made no new im-

pression on their minds. But the aim of Jesus was to call the attention of his auditors to the great principle, the indispensable condition upon which the awards of the heavenly kingdom would be distributed, "*when* the Son of Man should come." I do not conceive that he intended to assert that a particular day would come when a visible throne would be erected, surrounded by angels, and occupied by the Messiah, with all the nations of the earth arraigned before him. For all the phraseology of this passage, which would appear to teach this, was a part of the popular language of the day. It conveyed nothing new and unfamiliar to the Jewish mind. But the thought which he did design to make prominent, and to which all else in this description is incidental as the frame to the picture, was this, that by the great law or principle of the divine administration, the humane, pacific, and generous-hearted would be accepted, while upon the cruel and selfish would be inflicted the severest punishments. He sought to present a grand moral feature of the new dispensation. The retributive character of God's government, here and now, as well as elsewhere and hereafter, is one of the great truths or facts which Jesus proclaimed, and in the diffusion of which the coming of the kingdom consisted. He declared that all men would be judged in righteousness, that in obedience alone is life, and in transgression, misery, in this life as well as in the life to come. This momentous doctrine he taught in the forms of speech popular at the time, and under the familiar figure of a human tribunal and a day of judgment. The Jews were cherishing a proud revengeful temper. They expected the Messiah to lead them to battle and victory. And a representation like this was calculated to arrest their thoughts and induce them to consider themselves. The moral truth embodied in this

description was the principal point, and as it struck the minds of his listeners was likely to give them a new idea of the Messiah's glory. The meaning of Jesus is substantially as follows: "When the living spirit of the Son of Man shall come and be diffused through all nations, and its influence shall be attended with glorious exhibitions of power, when men shall recognise the heavenly kingdom not in a visible empire, but in the power of righteousness, then all honour will be awarded to the true-hearted and beneficent, and all shame to those who violate the sacred obligations of humanity." Not descent from Abraham, not the worthless, formal righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees would be regarded then, but a heart breathing mercy and prompt to all good works. This was what Jesus sought to teach, the great principle of God's moral government. In the acknowledgment of this and its kindred truths, the coming of the Son of Man consisted.

Properly speaking, his hearers were not led into error by the language of Jesus. They only fell short of its full significance. They did not so much misunderstand as fail to understand him. His language was not false, but inadequate, as all language is in reference to spiritual subjects. It did not confirm them in their erroneous ideas of the Messiah's coming, for that was not possible. It produced no new error. All that was new and peculiar in his representation of the advent of the Son of Man was a grand moral truth. And this it was that affected the minds of those who heard him if they were affected at all. The mass of the people were unmoved by what he said, or impressed only for a moment. His immediate disciples, those, who became his successors and apostles in the great work, were influenced by his statements concerning the approaching kingdom of the Christ. Their views were greatly modified and

spiritualised by his declarations in comparison with those of the people at large. In the minds of that small band the Jewish Idea underwent an important change. The moral characteristics of the expected kingdom were brought out more distinctly to their view and received more of their attention and awakened a deeper and increasing interest. The great hope, so worldly and narrow in other minds, became in theirs the hope of moral good, not so much of temporal as of spiritual blessings. They slowly began to perceive that whatever other pomp was to invest the person and the coming of the Christ, grace and peace and love would be his heavenliest ornaments. This was a great change ; and it was the direct effect of the influence of Jesus, of his words and works. So great was the change, that, after the lapse of a short time, they were found ready to meet peril and death—to forego all the common pursuits and enjoyments of life, in order to impress upon others the vast importance of a thorough cleansing of the heart as a preparation for the coming of the Son of Man.

Still, the views of the disciples, though greatly enlarged, were not wholly spiritualised. In other words, their minds were not raised to the same elevation with their master. They still retained the idea that the Messiah was to come in a manner, in some degree correspondent to the universal belief of the Jews. This is evident from particular passages and the general tenor of the Apostolic writings.* That the disciples still retained this impression was not owing to any thing they had heard from Jesus, but to the strength of their previous Jewish convictions, which, though greatly modified, were not wholly changed by his instructions. They were brought to a full belief in him as the Messiah.

* See Norton's Statement of Reasons, &c. p. 297—312.

But they never appear to have considered him as having come. During the whole period of his personal intercourse with them, while they believed him to be the Anointed of God, they seem to have regarded him as in a voluntary disguise, which they momentarily expected him to throw off. Even after his resurrection, they said to him, "Lord, wilt thou now restore the kingdom to Israel?" which was equivalent to saying, "Lord, wilt thou now come?"

And how natural was it that Jesus himself, conscious of no desire of personal display, no wish to be personally exalted, having fondly at heart a high moral purpose, how natural was it that, feeling thus, he should consider and represent himself as not yet having come, when he saw how little was the effect he was producing in comparison with what he aimed at and with the ultimate result! Deeply did he feel that he had not come to any adequate purpose. He saw how the stubborn pride of his countrymen withstood the divine force he exerted, how it prevented his entrance into the spiritual world and the erection of the kingdom of righteousness there. Naturally did he look forward to the removal of this obstacle as the event which would make way for his coming. Then he saw that he would indeed come, not visibly, to the outward eye, but with a living power to the Soul. This is what he meant by the coming of the Son of Man. Thus, as we have seen, he explained it himself in that striking passage which we quoted from his last conversation with his disciples. They did not understand him, explicit as he was. They still continued to believe that he would come in person. And they held to this belief, as I have already remarked, not because it had been imparted or confirmed by him, but through the previous strength of their old Jewish associations. Although they never entirely re-

linquished these Jewish conceptions of the coming of their Master, it is interesting to observe how little they were influenced by them. The glittering pageant, which was identified in the Jewish mind with the coming of the Messiah, was gradually growing dim and visionary—fading away before the illuminated vision of the Apostles of Christianity. The moral glory of the approaching kingdom was fast becoming more and more vivid and engrossing. Not in portraying the outward splendour of the Heavenly Reign and its consecrated Head did they spend their lives, but in urging men to repentance and amendment, in cleansing the human heart, in the inculcation of righteousness and love. This was their supreme interest. Their views never became as spiritual as those of Jesus, still the Holy Spirit of Truth was in them, and day by day, hour by hour it carried on a divine work in their bosoms, eradicating earthly desires, fostering generous affections, enlightening their understandings, and leading them onward in the ascending way of all Truth.*

* "When we compare the language of Christ respecting his future coming with the expectations expressed by his Apostles, we perceive that his language was misunderstood by them. He did not predict his visible return to earth to be the judge of men. There is nothing in his words which requires or justifies such an interpretation of them. It has appeared, I trust, that the figurative language which he used, is to be understood in a very different sense.

"But the Apostles, from various causes, were expecting such a return of their Master. Their words admit of no probable explanation, except as referring to this anticipated event. What then follows as a correct inference from this comparison?

"It follows that the words relating to this subject, which are ascribed to Christ in the Gospels, were truly his words. They were not falsely ascribed to him. They were not imagined for him. They were not conformed to the apprehensions of his followers. Had his followers fabricated or intentionally modified the words, they would have made their master say what they themselves have said, in language as explicit as their own.

"Here then we have evidence of the most unsuspicious kind, for it is clearly evidence which it was the purpose of no individual to furnish, that

certain words recorded in the Gospels were uttered by Christ. The writers of these books did not in this case fabricate language expressive of their own opinions, and ascribe it to him. And if they did not in this case, concerning a subject, on which they taught what he did not teach, we have no reason to suspect them of having, in any other case, intentionally ascribed to him, words which he did not utter.

"The words, then, ascribed to Christ in the Gospels are words of Christ. They have been reported by well-informed individuals, who had no intention of deceiving, and who did not even conform them to their own apprehensions of their meaning. I will not pursue the inferences from these truths. I will only observe, *that the proof of them, as we have seen, is, through the providence of God, bound up in the New Testament itself. An error of the Apostles proves the reality of their faith.* And I am persuaded, that as the New Testament is better understood, as the false notions that have prevailed concerning it pass away, and it is made a subject of enlightened investigation and philosophical study, new and irresistible proofs will appear of that fact, of which we can hardly estimate the full magnitude and interest, that Christ was a teacher from God." See Norton's Statement of Reasons, &c. pp. 327—329.

[I esteem it an invaluable privilege to have been introduced to the study of the New Testament under the clear and able guidance of Mr. Norton. How fully did he realise the idea of a true instructor, not standing still and pointing out our way for us over a beaten path, but ascending every height, descending into every depth with his whole attention and heart, and carrying the hearts of his pupils along with him. The remembrance of those days when a rich and powerful mind, animated by the spirit of truth, came close to my own mind, renders more vivid my sense of the meaning of the great Teacher of teachers when he described the increase of the power of the truth which was the life of his being, under the figure of a personal coming, and said, "If any man will keep my commandments, my Father will love him and *we will come unto him and make our abode with him.*" The argument, contained in this note, struck me with great force when it was first stated, in the course of our studies, by Mr. Norton; and has, for me, thrown great light upon the Gospels, showing that the very errors they contain upon subordinate points are interesting as proofs, "new and irresistible," because wholly undesigned, to the reality of all the important facts. I would fain hope that these pages may furnish some illustrations of the truth of the persuasion expressed at the close of the foregoing quotation.]

CHAPTER VI.

THE TEACHER.

"For it is an immutable truth, that what comes from the heart, that alone goes to the heart: what proceeds from a divine impulse, that the godlike alone can awaken."

COLERIDGE.

"True eloquence does not consist in speech. It must exist in the man, in the subject, and in the occasion. It comes, if it comes at all, like the out-breaking of a fountain from the earth, or the bursting force of volcanic fires, spontaneous, original, native."

WEBSTER.

It is characteristic of the biographers of Jesus, as we have seen, that they confine themselves to a naked statement of facts. But so peculiar and original was his style as a teacher, that once or twice, they pause to describe it, as, for instance, when they tell us that "he taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes," not like the established teachers of religion, and again, 'that he employed parables and seldom spake without a similitude.' His mode of instruction was indeed impressive, and it deserves particular attention. It was singular, inasmuch as it was purely natural, devoid of every thing artificial, set.

The first thing to be remarked in Jesus as a public teacher was his entire freedom as to times and places. On one occasion he was seated for the purpose of in-

struction on the side of a mountain ; at another, in a vessel cast off a little way from the shore crowded with auditors. Again we find him discoursing among men of profligate lives and tax gatherers, that odious class of persons ; and again, at the entertainments of the rich and honourable. And all this without the slightest affectation. For at the same time he never scrupled to enter the synagogues, the consecrated places of instruction, on the Sabbath, the stated occasions of religious service, and to teach in accordance with the usual forms. He spoke freely and spontaneously wherever the opportunity offered, either in the open air and on the highway, or in the synagogue or the temple. By this simple and natural method, all that he uttered acquired a freshness and force of which the formal expositions of the regular teachers of the day were destitute. He confined himself to no set times nor places. He availed himself of no laboured modes of instruction. His teaching was exclusively oral, and this of the most informal character. He used no paper nor parchment. He committed not a word to writing. While he was thus original, he did not affect originality. He used no new phraseology, but the common forms of speech, the household language of the people. He never sought to magnify his own method of proceeding by denouncing any other. There is a uniform simplicity, a perfect superiority to forms, in his bearing as a teacher : his peculiarity in this respect, as in so many others, is the absence of all peculiarity, the entire freedom from all technicalities.

How striking the contrast between him and all other teachers ! Although he employed none of the usual means of extending his religion, how wide is the sphere through which his words have ranged ! “ A poor uneducated peasant,” I use the eloquent language of

another,* “by labouring for three years in the most despised corner of the most despised nation on earth, whose whole territory is but a speck on the map of the world,—laid the foundation of a work which was to survive the changes of empires, and the ruins of the philosophies and religions of man. And this, without seeming to make provision by any means adequate to such an effect. Other teachers have committed their wisdom to writing, lest, being entrusted to words which are but breath, it should be dispersed and lost. But Jesus confided in the divine energy of his doctrine; and, with an unconcern truly sublime, cast it abroad to make its own way and perpetuate its own existence. Other instructors have elaborately wrought out their systems; have sometimes clothed them in eloquence which seemed little less than inspiration, and promised perpetual continuance to their influence over men. Yet how small and short has that influence proved! How have their sects disappeared! And by how very few are their works even read, though still accounted among the perfect productions of the human mind! While Jesus, uninstructed in human philosophy, with no attainment in the elegant learning of the world, teaching but for three years, and putting not a syllable upon record—has yet made his instructions as familiar to the nations as their own native tongues—has bestowed on the humblest of his followers a wisdom superior to that of the Grecian masters themselves—nay, has affected the whole mass both of sentiment and character, throughout, as those great, laborious and long-lived men were able to affect only a few familiar friends within the privileged sphere of their own personal influence.”

* H. Ware, Jr.

Unfettered by formalities, the Founder of Christianity was enabled to take powerful advantage of circumstances. This constitutes another trait of his character as a teacher. While the professional teachers of the day were employed in commenting upon the traditions, and in nice and puerile distinctions, Jesus walked amidst the works of nature and the busy scenes of life; almost every object and every circumstance he arrested, and made them the messengers of his instructions. He became a voice to nature and Providence, or rather he made them the witnesses and symbols of the things which he uttered. It is true he frequently expressed himself in general terms, employing those universal forms of speech by which abstract truths or principles are enunciated.* But, as I have already observed, this general mode of speaking is almost always suggested by deep feeling, and special instances. It does not necessarily imply a state of mental abstraction. And if we carefully examine the passages, in which at first sight it appears as if Jesus were merely announcing general truths or principles, we may find reason to suspect that he was speaking on those occasions with profound emotion, awakened by some present and particular incident. But however this may be, his utterances are obviously suggested and modified, in most instances, by circumstances. Does he speak of the Providence of God? He points to the ravens† wheeling about in the depths of the sky, and to the lilies‡ growing in the fields around him. Are little

* See Chap. V. Pt. I. p. 54.

† In the exquisite lines of Bryant to the waterfowl, we have an amplification of a passage in the sermon on the mount.

‡ The following Sonnet by Mrs. Hemans may be familiar to the reader, but I cannot deny myself the pleasure of enriching my pages with it.

“Flowers! when the Saviour’s calm benignant eye
Fell on your gentle beauty;—when from you

children brought to him? He takes them in his arms and beholds in them a resemblance to the inhabitants of the spiritual world. Is he athirst? He is reminded of that living water of which if a man drink, he shall never thirst again. Blindness and death suggest spiritual blindness and spiritual death. Is he followed by an immense multitude? He finds in the circumstance an occasion of solemn and emphatic admonition, turning round and declaring that he who would indeed follow him, must be ready to take up his cross, and consider himself a doomed man. Is mention made to him of his mother and brethren? His language instantly is, "whosoever doeth the will of my Father in Heaven, the same is my mother and sister and brother." Has he cast out an evil spirit? He is instinctively prompted to allude to the evil spirit of unbelief which possessed the hearts of many of those around him. Is he sorely tempted? "Watch and pray," he exclaims, "lest ye enter into temptation." But why should I specify instances? Read over the Gospels with this view, and you will find that the sentiments uttered by Jesus were continually suggested by passing occurrences. His discourses were never formal, abstract, studied, but directly and strikingly the reverse. On so many occasions does this appear from what is

That heavenly lesson from all hearts he drew
 Eternal, universal, as the sky,—
 Then, in the bosom of your purity,
 A voice He set, as in a temple shrine,
 That life's quick travellers ne'er might pass you by
 Unwarned of that sweet oracle divine.
 And though too oft its low, celestial sound,
 By the harsh notes of work-day Care is drown'd,
 And the low steps of vain, unlistening Haste,
 Yet, the great ocean hath no tone of power
 Mightier to reach the soul, in thought's hush'd hour,
 Than yours, ye lilies! chosen thus and graced!"

explicitly related in the narratives, that even when there is no allusion made by the narrators to the particular circumstances under which he spoke, we may fairly infer them from the forms in which his declarations are expressed. When he pronounced himself the light of the world, we may suppose that the thought was suggested by the rising of the sun; and when he said "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman," it may be conjectured that he was walking with his disciples in sight of the vineyards on his way to the garden to which he loved to resort.

Let us pause over the probable circumstances of one very interesting passage of his life, as related in the 7th chapter of John.

The Jews were celebrating one of their great national festivals, the Feast of Tabernacles as it was called. It lasted eight days and consisted of a series of the most imposing ceremonies. It was designed to commemorate the sojourn of the Israelites in the wilderness after their departure from Egypt. It received its name from the tabernacles or bowers which, formed of branches of trees, were erected by the people in the open air, and in which they ate and drank and spent a large portion of their time during the continuance of the festival. By these tabernacles, which filled the city, and must have presented a most picturesque appearance, the people were reminded of that early age when their ancestors, flying from Egyptian oppression, erected similar dwellings in the wilderness. National enthusiasm and religious zeal brought the Jews from all parts of Judea and from distant countries, up to Jerusalem, to observe this stirring festival. At that celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles to which we now have reference, the people were universally excited by the expectation of the speedy appearance

of a long-promised and heaven-sent Deliverer, who should emancipate his country from the Roman yoke, and raise it to the highest earthly grandeur. And, what was not a little startling, a strange individual had appeared, one Jesus, of the obscure town of Nazareth. He had already produced a great sensation in Galilee and elsewhere by his astonishing works of power and mercy, and by the originality of his whole career. At the Feast he appeared publicly in the Temple, exciting the wonder of those who heard him by the boldness and authority with which he spake. The leading men of the nation, alarmed at the impression he was making, employed officers to seize his person. They returned to those by whom they were sent, the commission unexecuted. When asked why they had not brought him, they replied, "never man spake like this man."*

By connecting what we know of the ceremonies observed at this festival with this part of the history of Jesus, we shall perceive an impressive example of that characteristic of his teaching, upon which we are remarking—the promptness with which he seized upon occasions and made them speak for him and with him. On the last and great day of the feast, the same day on which the officers, sent to apprehend Jesus, are said to have made the above-mentioned confession, the services of the temple were peculiarly magnificent. Then all the people forsook their tabernacles, and crowded the courts of the sanctuary. The officiating priests were arranged in due form before the altar. A golden vessel of water from the spring of Siloam was brought, the bearer crying aloud, "with joy we draw water from the well of Salvation." The words were taken up and repeated by the assembled multitudes. The

* Here again is an instance of the unqualified manner in which strong feeling expresses itself.

water was mingled with wine and poured upon the altar, amidst the shouts of the people. 'This was the ceremony of which it was commonly said among the Jews, "he who has not seen the joy of the drawing of water, has seen no joy."*' Now we cannot help imagining it was in some sort of connexion with this impressive ceremony,—probably in one of the pauses or intervals of the service, that, as we read, Jesus stood up and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink, and from within him shall flow rivers of living water." The stirring cry had just burst from all lips, "with joy we draw water from the wells of Salvation." The water of Siloam was pure and refreshing to the sense and hallowed to the mind of the multitude. But Jesus said, 'Come unto me and I will slake your thirst. A full, rich and perennial fountain of blessedness I will open in your hearts.' The circumstances of the occasion were so impressive that, as the narrative goes on to inform us, 'many of the people when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ.' And then too it was, that the officers sent to take Jesus returned without him, saying, "Never man spake like this man."

This characteristic of the teaching of Jesus, the constant advantage which he took of circumstances, lets us incidentally into the secret of his extraordinary power as a teacher. It shows that what he said, he said from his heart; that the sentiments he uttered had first become his own sentiments, parts of himself, the irrepressible feelings of his own soul. He spake, because he believed, he knew, he felt with the whole undivided force of his spirit. He did not speak from hearsay, or because he was expected to speak, or with a view to

* Helon's Pilgrimage to Jerusalem, translated from the German of Fred. Strauss. Boston ed. vol. ii. page 231.

effect. From no outward call of vanity or interest, did he express himself. It was upon those rivers of living water of which he spake, and which were welling up in his own bosom, that his words floated forth and were poured with resistless power into the souls of those who heard him. In short, his words were sincere and true, the direct and natural expression of truth identified with his inmost being, the deep springs of his own character and life.

That this was the character of his eloquence is apparent, I conceive, from the unstudied, extemporaneous, occasional, form of his instructions. When a man's heart is full of a particular object, it is curious to observe how every thing that happens, connects itself in his mind with the one engrossing topic of his feelings. Every thing is looked at in relation to that which chiefly interests him, and every event suggests reflections connected with his favourite pursuit. How often do we discover the several professions of a number of individuals, from the manner in which they express themselves under particular circumstances! Their modes of thought and speech will be affected by the subject which commands their principal attention, and holds the first place in their hearts. Thus, the seaman, the merchant, the mechanic, the lawyer and the physician may all be recognised by their respective ways of thinking and speaking; and in the same situation each will find something analogous to his daily pursuit, and think and express himself accordingly. "Is it strange," asks Ebenezer Elliott, the Sheffield worker in steel, "that my language is fervent as a welding heat, when my thoughts are passions that rush burning from my mind, like white-hot bolts of steel?" Most fairly and naturally may we infer the existence of a deep spiritual fountain in the nature of Jesus, from the fact

that scarcely any thing could occur in his presence, which he did not consider and represent in a spiritual light. How plainly does he show what it was that most deeply interested him !

I apprehend that in this respect he has never yet been understood. He so uniformly represented himself as speaking and acting by the express command of God, that he is too much regarded as a passive instrument, the mechanical agent of another and higher Being. We are not aware of the strong personal interest which the whole style of his teaching undesignedly shows he must have cherished in his work. The principal force of the Divine command was felt by him in the free and inner force of his own convictions. The voice of his own soul, clear and imperative—this it was that he revered as the commanding voice of his Father. This was to him the most intimate and solemn expression of the Divine authority. His words were continually modified and suggested by external circumstances. And what does this indicate but the fulness of his heart, the inexhaustible abundance of his spirit ? Must it not have been with him even as I have said, that he was full of spiritual life, and that when he spoke he spoke from within ? He could not have held his peace, and he needed no outward inducement to speak, but such as was offered at the moment. The vessel was filled to the brim, and every breath made it overflow, and like the precious ointment upon the head of the High-priest that ran down, down to the skirts of his garments, the costly streams from the full heart of Jesus, fell upon the world cleansing and sanctifying.

Here was the unequalled power of the words of Jesus. This it was that gave them a victorious influence. They were uttered simply and earnestly, as the natural expression of thoughts and sentiments, which he

himself cherished and felt far more deeply than it was in the power of any language to express. This is true Eloquence,—when a man speaks not for the sake of effect, not from any outward necessity, but from an impulse within which he cannot resist,—from the concentrated force of his own convictions. Then words are words no longer. They are acts. They exhibit and convey the life's life, that energy of human thought and feeling which is of eternity and of God. Of all the powers of nature, the power of a human spirit, thoroughly persuaded in itself, penetrated with faith, is the most vital and intense. When the force of such a spirit is bodied forth either by word or deed, it acts upon all surrounding spirits—on all other minds. A brief sentence, a single articulate sound of the voice, coming from the heart, or rather bringing the heart along with it, possesses a resistless power. It is like “the piercing of a sword,” like “a winged thunderbolt,” prostrating all opposition, inflaming all souls. Such are the sympathies between man and man. It was this that gave to Peter the Hermit the power to arouse all Europe, nobles and their vassals, priests and kings, the rich and the poor, men, women and children, and lead them to the recovery of the Holy Land. The historian Gibbon sneers at his fanaticism and confesses his power, observing that “the most perfect orator of Athens might have envied the success of his eloquence.” Ignorant though he was, mean and contemptible in appearance, still his words expressed the burning convictions of his own soul, and so he created the same convictions in other men.

Seldom, alas ! have human words exerted this influence. The reason how obvious ! They have seldom shown themselves to be the inspiration of the living heart. They, who have enjoyed the opportunity and

the privilege of teaching, have taught from self-interest or for reputation's sake, or to produce upon others an effect which has never been wrought upon themselves. They have been sworn to maintain and advocate certain established systems of religious opinion. They have consequently spoken, because they were required to speak and must say something, and take good care not to deviate from a track before appointed. How widely opposite to all this, the spirit of a true teacher, of one in whom the truth lives and works as in Jesus of Nazareth, stimulating every power, inspiring every affection, commanding his whole being, and who therefore speaks because something within—the voice of the living God, commands and will not be disobeyed. He must utter himself even if he perish in the act. He neither thinks to please nor to offend, to conciliate nor to shock. His feeling is—Let me speak out my own heart or let me die! He that hath the word of the Lord, hath it stamped upon his inmost being, sounding for ever through the secret chambers of the soul, let him speak that word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat?

The teaching of Jesus being so uniformly associated with the incidents in the midst of which he lived, we have in this circumstance an interesting ground for believing, that what he is recorded to have uttered was actually uttered by him. If the things ascribed to him were fictitious, made for him by the authors of the New Testament histories,—if these writers had put into his mouth things which he did not say, it is impossible they should have been so particular and occasional. They would have been more general and abstract. "We may conclude," says Dr. Jortin, one of the wisest theologians the Church of England has ever produced,

“that the writers of the Gospels have given always the substance, often the words of our Lord’s sermons. They did not invent discourses and ascribe them to him, as Plato is supposed to have given his own thoughts to his master Socrates, and as Greek and Latin historians never scrupled to do. If they had followed this method, they would probably have made for him discourses exhorting to virtue, and dissuading from vice, in general terms. It would not have entered their thoughts to have crowded together so many allusions to time and place, and to other little occurrences which nothing besides the presence of the object could suggest.”*

The peculiar style of the teaching of Jesus is interesting in another point of view. We cannot but be struck, upon the most cursory perusal of the four Gospels, with their particularity,—the frequent minuteness of their details. The question arises, if they are true histories, and were not written until years after the events related took place, and their authors did not take notes at the time and on the spot, and neither of these is pretended, how comes it that the writers recollected things so particularly?

This is a fair inquiry, and in order to arrive at the true answer we must first make due allowance for the peculiar style of the writers. Much of the particularity of detail apparent in these histories exists only in appearance—in the form of the narration. Authors unpractised in the art of composition, possessing only a limited vocabulary, naturally adopt a scenic or dramatic mode of relation. This is manifest in the works of all primitive writers and historians. I find in the ninety-fourth number of the *Edinburgh Review*, in an article

* Discourses on the truth of the Christian Religion.

entitled "History," (page 333, English edition,) the following remarks illustrative of the point under consideration. "The faults of Herodotus," says the reviewer, "are the faults of a simple and imaginative mind. Children and servants are remarkably Herodotean in their style of narration. They tell every thing dramatically. Their *says hes* and *says shes* are proverbial. Every person, who has had to settle their disputes, knows that, even when they have no intention to deceive, their reports of conversation always require to be carefully sifted. If an educated man were giving an account of the late change of administration, he would say—'Lord Goderich resigned: and the King, in consequence, sent for the Duke of Wellington.' A porter tells the story as if he had been hid behind the curtains of the royal bed at Windsor: 'So Lord Goderich says, "I cannot manage this business; I must go out." So the King says,—says he, "Well, then, I must send for the Duke of Wellington—that's all."' "This," adds the Reviewer, "is in the very manner of the father of history." And this, we also may perceive, is in the very manner of the unpractised writers of the New Testament histories. They continually express themselves, not only as if they were ear-witnesses, when, from their own showing, it is manifest this could not have been the case, but also as if they were present in the very bosoms of those of whom they speak, and knew exactly the forms of language which their thoughts took, as they arose in their minds. Instances in point may be gathered upon every page of the Gospels. The forty-eighth verse of the twenty-sixth chapter of Matthew, runs thus: "Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, 'Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast.'" The narrator is not to be supposed to give the precise words uttered by Judas.

This is simply his way of relating the circumstance. A more cultivated writer would have stated it somewhat in this manner: "The traitor had agreed to point out the person they were to seize by kissing him." Again in Matthew ix. 3, it is said, "And behold, certain of the Scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth;" as if the writer heard what they said. We read in the book of Acts, that after Paul had defended himself before Agrippa, "the king rose up, and Bernice, and they that sat with them. And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, 'This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.' " Of course, the historian is not to be understood as if he had been present and heard the private conversation of the king and his counsellors. This minuteness of narration belongs to an age and a writer comparatively primitive.*

* I cannot help thinking that the above remarks throw light upon the following passage of the Gospel of Mark xiv. 12—16: "And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, 'Where wilt thou that we go and prepare, that thou mayest eat the passover?' And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, 'Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water; follow him. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the good man of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guest chamber where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he will show you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us.' And his disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover." At first sight there appears to be something supernatural in the knowledge which Jesus possessed of the man to whom he sent his two disciples, and of the circumstances under which they would meet him. But it is worthy of note that the parallel passage in Matthew produces no impression of this kind. "Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread, the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, 'Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?' And he said, 'Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.' And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover." From this statement of Matthew, I infer that the miraculous air, given to this portion of the history by Mark and Luke, exists only in appearance, and results from the mode of narration. There

These remarks, however, account for the particularity of the Gospel histories only in part. They do not cover the whole difficulty. We are still at a loss to know how these writers came to recollect so many particulars. It is therefore to be considered further that, although it is not pretended that they wrote until years after the death of Jesus, still it is not to be supposed that the events which make up their narratives, had lain dormant in their minds in the interval. The

are many probable particulars in the case, which the historians in their brief and peculiar mode of narration may have omitted, mentioning only the most prominent. Jesus may naturally enough have been acquainted with some well-disposed inhabitant of Jerusalem, who, he knew, was accustomed to send a servant daily for water to one of the public wells or springs, Siloam, perhaps. There were numbers in the streets of the city constantly bearing water to and fro. So that we cannot but suppose, that the directions which Jesus gave to his two disciples, were more full and minute than they are represented. They were probably directed to a certain spot, where they may have waited we know not how long. But I cheerfully commend this passage of the history to the good sense and intelligence of the reader. Similar observations are applicable to the passage where we are told that Jesus sent his disciples to procure the ass upon which he rode into Jerusalem.

The remarks made in the text, appear to me to throw some light also upon the memorable passage in Genesis i. 26: "And God said, 'Let us make man in our image,' " &c. Nobody imagines that God actually spoke. And it is equally clear, I conceive, that he did not consult any other being. According to the poetic and scenic style of the primitive period, when this account of the creation was written, God is described as speaking—as addressing directly the objects created. But when the writer comes to the creation of man, he shows his sense of man's dignity, and his superiority to the other works of God, by representing the Deity as first planning this his best work before he created it. To express this idea, God must be introduced as *telling* what he is about to do; and if so, then such a form of speech must be adopted, as would imply the presence of some being or beings, to whom the plan of the Divine mind was communicated; otherwise, all the effect of representing the Deity as speaking, might, to an imaginative mind, be lost. The idea of the dignity of human nature, thus poetically expressed in the Mosaic account of the creation, is also found in the writings of Seneca, and, it is curious to observe, with precisely that difference in the mode or style of expressing it, which we should expect between writers of such different degrees of cultivation. "*Cogitavit nos,*" says the philosopher, "*ante Natura quam fecit!*"—"Nature paused before she made us." See Le Clerc in V. T.

things which they record, they had been relating orally for years. The contents of these books had in all probability constituted the burthen of their preaching, the testimony whereby they created faith in the minds of their hearers.

But it is in that trait of the teaching of Jesus upon which I have been remarking, that I find a satisfactory explanation of the minuteness of detail which characterises these writings. Had his discourses been abstract and general, we might well doubt whether they could have been so easily remembered. But as it was, his style of teaching was most admirably adapted to fix the sentiments and often the very words he uttered in the memory. Had he carefully and designedly taught upon a system of Mnemonics, he could not have stamped his words more effectually upon the minds of his hearers, beyond the possibility of being forgotten. We are all familiar with that curious law of the mind, the law of association. We all know how easy it is to preserve the remembrance of the merest trifles, if they only chance to be associated with some outward object or incident. When we travel a road after a long interval, its successive scenes, as they present themselves, will recall the most transient thoughts that were suggested, the most incidental remarks that were made, the last time we passed that way. We perceive that almost every syllable of the declarations of Jesus was uttered under circumstances rendering it impossible that it should ever be forgotten. On one occasion, when attended by an immense multitude, he turned round while the people were crowding after him, and said, "If any man will be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me." I doubt whether any who heard these words, fully understood their purport at the time. And yet when we consider the circum-

stances under which they were said, we see that they must have made a startling and ineffaceable impression. A crowd was following Jesus, intensely excited by the hope that he would prove to be the Messiah—the glorious leader and king so long and ardently looked for. Taking advantage of this state of feeling, Jesus declared in substance, “If you would indeed follow me, you must take up your crosses, you must consider yourselves as condemned to death.” Again turn to the account of the raising of Lazarus. When Jesus had cried aloud “‘Lazarus, come forth,’ he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes, and with a cloth about his face. And Jesus said, ‘Loose him and let him go.’” At first view we cannot help feeling that there is an abrupt falling off here in the narrative, a sudden descent to a trifling particular—to an observation apparently and comparatively insignificant. We instantly ask how came Jesus to give this trifling direction? Or, if he did give it, how happened the narrator to recollect it and to think it worth while to put it on record? These queries are silenced the instant we recur to the probable circumstances. If the dead man actually appeared, into what consternation must the by-standers have been thrown! Some shrieked, some fainted, and all, bereft of their composure, and doubting whether they beheld an apparition or real flesh and blood, left Lazarus struggling in the grave-clothes in which he was wrapt ‘hand and foot.’ How could any one present ever forget the sublime self-possession which Jesus alone preserved, and with which he quietly bade them go and loose the grave-clothes, and set Lazarus at liberty.

So by numerous instances it might be shown, that oftentimes the slightest remark of Jesus must have sunk deeply into the minds of those around him, in

association with the particular circumstances, and under the pressure of the peculiar occasions on which it was uttered.

Another characteristic of his teaching, to which I would ask a moment's attention, is the entire absence of all that is vulgarly termed speculation—theory. Every sentiment uttered by Jesus, admits of being understood as the expression of a fact—an eternal and essential truth. His religion, as a revelation, is a revelation of things true from all eternity. The great topics of his teaching were not the fancies, the creations of his own mind. They existed in the nature of things. When he declares, for instance, that 'unto him who hath shall be given, and from him who hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath,' who does not see that this is only the assertion of a truth, wrought into our very nature and condition and corroborated by all our observation of life. He who improves acquires more power; he who does not improve loses the power which he originally possessed. Again read over the beatitudes and you will find that they all express natural truths. "Happy are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Is not inward purity the sense, the eye whereby we discern the Pure Spirit, the indwelling God of the Universe? "Happy are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." In the possession of a merciful temper, have we not a gift of Divine Love—a token of Divine mercy!

It is, by the way, an impressive circumstance, that the first of his discourses of any length on record, the Sermon on the Mount, as it is termed, (Matth. v. 3 to 11 inclusive,) should commence with an answer to the great question which philosophers had in vain endeavoured to solve, with a definition of happiness. And what a definition! altogether so original that the wisest

of human teachers may well withhold their vaunted wisdom and shrink from a comparison. Not in pride and plenty and mirth, but in a lowly, sorrowing mind, amidst persecution and tears and blood, he saw the elements, the springs of human blessedness. Study those wonderful words of his, and see how true it is in the very nature of things that they only are blessed whom he pronounced so.

But to return. Even in that startling declaration 'Whoso liveth and believeth in me, shall never die,' we have an indisputable fact. Is it not inevitably and unchangeably true, that death ceases to be death to him whose feelings and views accord with the spirit of this great Teacher! When he spoke of his coming in power and great glory, he asserted, as I have endeavoured to show in the foregoing chapter, a simple fact of which we are the witnesses. He is coming in the influence of his Religion, more gloriously, with a deeper and more searching power, than if he had appeared in person amidst the clouds of Heaven, accompanied by an angelic host.

If we cannot always discern the whole of the truths he uttered in nature and life, we can at least discover some intimations, some germs of them there. Affecting no peculiarity of language, he freely expressed himself in the popular religious phraseology of the day, but interpreted, as the language of every man should be, by the general tone of his life, we see that it was used by him metaphorically. Who, for instance, can for a moment suppose that when he talked of his kingdom and his glory, he had any idea of an outward kingdom, a visible glory, when his whole life shows so eloquently that it was the glory of an entire self-sacrifice which won and inspired his whole soul. Recollect his declaration to Pilate, "Yes, I am a king." How does he

define his regal character? 'For this end was I born,' he adds, 'and for this cause came I into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every true man is my subject.' How perfect his definition of real power—of true greatness! 'Let him who would be the greatest be the servant of all!' To the beautiful correctness of this definition, what evidence has been afforded in the history of the world! Even the great doctrine of a future life, so frequently represented as a peculiar doctrine of Christianity, is no where formally asserted by Jesus. It is rather taken for granted—treated as a plain and indisputable fact. And if the theologians were not so anxious to exalt the Gospel at the expense of reason and nature, it might be perceived that the immortality of man, like all the other truths of the New Testament, is written in our very nature, and that in all his allusions to it, Jesus regarded it as a natural truth.

So much now may I venture to say, that with respect to the substance as well as the style of his teaching, the author of Christianity affected nothing peculiar, and herein was his greatest peculiarity—his most original trait. He treated the truths he uttered as great and momentous truths; as possessed of a value of which the world had not dreamed, of a profoundness which thought had not fathomed. He declared them with a new authority, and exemplified them as they have never been exemplified before nor since. But he did not appropriate them to himself. They were of the world,—of eternity and of God.

Behold now the unutterable, everlasting glory—alas! that I should be compelled to add, the as yet unsuspected glory of the humble peasant of Judea, that he taught fully by his lips and his life, what?—the very truth which universal Nature from all its heights and

depths, and the infinite God teach ! I confess I see no disparagement to Christ in the fact that Christianity is as old as the Creation, for I believe that it is a great deal older—from eternity. ‘Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever God had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting,’ is the truth taught by Christ.

But why, it may be asked, why call the truths of Religion by his name, if they were taught so long ago and by so many mighty teachers, if they were, long before he appeared, engraven upon the ancient tables of the human heart ? For a plain and emphatic reason. The life of Jesus of Nazareth, his words, acts and sufferings, being real, being facts, are a part of the grand and all-instructive system of Creation,—they constitute a page, nay, a chapter, and at once the profoundest and the clearest chapter, in the vast volume of God. No where do I see spiritual and eternal things so clearly revealed, so touchingly expressed, as in his life. The truth which all else teaches is presented by him and in him with a new significance, an original beauty. Let it be that he taught nothing more than the religion of Nature, still by concentrating all its force and loveliness in his individual being, by incorporating it with his life, and so teaching it as it had never been taught by any other, he made natural religion **HIS** religion, **HIS** truth. He has given a new illustration of it. Regard his life as only a part and portion of the great system of Nature, the grand chain of Providence,—still I say that from no quarter of the grand whole come there such all-enlightening beams as from him. His history amidst all objects and events is by far the most luminous point. It is the grand interpretation of Nature—the Revelation of her mysteries. There the truth shines forth with satisfying clearness. Therefore

do I hold it to be true and right to call the truth he preached through his own being, *his* truth—*Christian* truth. When it is so denominated, it is not meant that he appropriated it to himself. On the contrary, in the sense in which it is *his*, it is more effectually put within the reach of all men, and imparted to all, and we are made to feel that it is living and eternal truth. It may sound extravagantly, yet so perfect is the manifestation of the spiritual power and beauty of truth in him, that if I presumed to say, but I do not—if I presumed to say for what *one* purpose God made all that we see, and arranged the mighty and complicated course of events, I should say it was in order to provide a sphere for the manifestation of such a being as Jesus of Nazareth; that he is the Masterpiece of the Divine Artist, for the creation of which all else was ordained,—“the Heir of all things.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE MIRACLES.

PART I.

"There is a certain character or *style*, (if I may use the expression) in the operations of Divine Wisdom;—something which every where announces, amidst an infinite variety of detail, an inimitable unity and harmony of design."

DUGALD STEWART.

"We ought to expect to see one course of divine action impressed with the same signatures, which we trace on another, proceeding from the same source."

PALFREY'S ACADEMICAL LECTURES.

As the Man of Nazareth went about announcing the approach of the Kingdom, portraying its grand spiritual characteristics, and warning men of the absolute necessity of personal holiness as a preparation for its blessedness, he performed numerous acts of unprecedented power and mercy. The sick were healed, the blind restored to sight, and the dead raised to life by the touch of his hand or the word of his mouth.

These acts are what we term the Christian Miracles. By some they are rejected as essentially incredible. By others, who recognise the divinity of the words and character of Jesus, they are neither acknowledged nor denied. While others again warmly

affirm their truth, insist upon their importance, but believe that they were principally valuable at the time when they occurred, and to the persons in whose presence they were wrought, and feel no interest in them for themselves, valuing them not for any intrinsic worth, but merely as fundamental to other facts or truths. Their belief in them amounts to but little more than a vehement assertion of their reality.

These false impressions respecting the miracles of Jesus may be traced to a false theory of the facts. That some have pronounced them incredible, that others have been at a loss to form any satisfactory idea of them, and that even those who have maintained their truth, have yet failed to feel their value—all is owing to the false representation which has been given of their nature and design. They are represented as violations or suspensions of the established laws of Creation, alterations of the Divine method, changes in the way of the Divine proceeding. It is not affirmed in so many words that the Universe is a machine. But such has been the prevalent mode of describing the miracles, that the idea is unavoidably produced of a huge mechanism, whose regular action was on a particular occasion interrupted, simply to exhibit the power of the Great Superintendant attesting the authority of Christ, as if, on all other occasions, God sat passively apart, and only then put forth his own right hand, and produced certain effects, for the occurrence of which there was no provision in the original plan and construction of things. Such, as nearly as I am able to describe it, is the common view of the miracles. It is insisted that they must be regarded in this way, or they are not believed in at all, as if the rejection of a particular theory of the facts were not perfectly con-

sistent with the fullest admission of the facts themselves.

But it is not my purpose to enlarge upon the erroneousness of the common view of the miracles. Upon this point I have only two remarks to offer.

In the first place it is observable that there is nothing in the term 'miracle,' that requires us to regard the facts to which this name is given as violations of the laws of nature. Its meaning is simply 'a wonder.'

And secondly, there is not the shadow of authority in the Scriptures themselves, for the opinion that the wonderful works of Jesus, were departures from the established order of nature, however much they vary from the order of human experience. It is true he referred them directly to the Father. "The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works." But precisely with the same explicitness did he refer other events, confessedly within the course of nature, to the immediate agency of God. "Blessed art thou, Simon, son of Jonas," said he to Peter, who had just avowed his faith in him as the Christ, "for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in Heaven." Did he mean to say that Peter had been the subject of a special revelation, that, in this case, the common laws of the mind had been suspended, in short, that a miracle (using the word in its popular sense) had been wrought in Peter? Surely not. The plain fact was, Peter had come to the recognition of Jesus as the Christ, not by relying on human authority, 'flesh and blood,' not under the guidance of fleshly passions, but through an ingenuous and true spirit of mind, which is the spirit of God in the soul. And it is unnecessary to suppose that Jesus intended, by the foregoing language, to state any thing more than this

simple fact. He saw a divine agency, the Spirit of God, in the truth of Peter's mind. Peter had come to a faith in Jesus naturally, but nevertheless divinely. The whole language of Jesus is fashioned upon the recognition of the direct agency of God. His words as well as his works he ascribed to the Father. Facts most obviously natural he described precisely in the same way with his miracles. His disciples once asked him why he always spake to the people in parables. Mark the mode of speech which he uses in reply, "Unto you it is given to know the hidden things of the kingdom, but unto them it is not given." The language implies that a knowledge of certain things had been directly (miraculously, according to the popular idea of these times,) given to the disciples, and as directly withheld from the people at large. The simple meaning of Jesus is, 'you are able to understand the hidden things of the kingdom, but they are not able.' This is all, I conceive, that he intended, a simple statement of fact. The people were unable to understand him except by parables. This inability, which had been produced naturally enough, Jesus refers to the direct appointment of Heaven. Again, "Murmur not among yourselves," said he to the Jews, "no man can come to me, except the Father who hath sent me draw him." He certainly did not intend to teach that no one could understand him, unless a miracle were wrought on him. His meaning is, 'If you are to understand me, you must be moved by the same spirit that moves me. As I am sent to you, you must be sent to me.' It was necessary to a sympathy of mind between him and his hearers that they should have some measure of that spirit which he possessed without measure. The whole phraseology of the Scriptures is modified by this idea, that all things, the common as well as the

extraordinary, are to be referred to a divine power. This is the philosophy of the Bible. And in no instance, does the language of Jesus, taken by itself, require us to consider the events thus referred to God as deviations from the order of things, as miracles in the common meaning of the term. Jesus simply declares that his works are divine works, the works of God.

The one question which we are chiefly concerned to decide is, Did these remarkable facts occur as they are represented? Were the sick healed, the blind restored to sight, the dead raised at the touch and command of Jesus of Nazareth? This is the point to be determined. And it can be settled only by a thorough examination of the records of these extraordinary events which have come down to us. We can decide whether these facts actually occurred only by a careful examination of the facts themselves, and of the manner in which they are related.

Are they told as such things would be told were they true?

And are they consistent with themselves, with the character of the Person to whom they are ascribed, and with all the circumstances of the case? These are the questions to be answered.

The first thing that strikes us is the extraordinariness of the facts reported. It is related that Jesus touched the lepers, and instantly they were cleansed. He spake, and the lame walked, the paralytic received strength, the blind sight, and the dead awoke from their mysterious slumbers. He walked upon the waves, and with a few loaves and fishes satisfied the hunger of thousands. And finally he himself on the third day

after his death, rose from the grave, and was seen and conversed with by many. These things are most strange. But we cannot on account of their strangeness alone refuse to consider them. They are not palpable impossibilities. They involve no absurdity, unprecedented as they are. All things, even the most familiar, are unspeakably wonderful. Every object that we look upon is a mystery. Custom hides from us the wonderfulness of this condition of existence, or "we should see ourselves in a world of miracles, wherein all fabled or authentic thaumaturgy and feats of magic were outdone;" and we should see also that the strangeness of an event is no reason of itself for denying its reality. We should be prepared to believe every thing. As it is, notwithstanding the powerful influence of familiarity in deadening our sense of the marvellous, the great and diversified wonders of existence have in all times impressed the mind of man so powerfully that the main tendency always has been to believe—to receive fables for facts; so that it becomes those, who would judge truly, not indeed to reject a reported fact, because it is strange, but to look well to the evidence, and proceed with the utmost caution.

At this point of our investigation, a plausible supposition suggests itself. The accounts of these marvels were either interwoven with the histories of Jesus at some early period by some other than the original writers—some one or more, impelled thereto by interested motives or a fondness for the wonderful, or they are exaggerated, distorted statements of ordinary events, given by the original writers themselves.

This supposition strikes us at first sight as very plausible. But as our examination proceeds, not only is it shown to be wholly without foundation, but evidence

of a positive and most impressive character is disclosed, going to show that the relations of the miracles are from the same hands that have given us the other parts of the history, the same hands, guided by the same singleness of mind, the same truthfulness. One and the same spirit is revealed throughout, as well in the notices of the miracles as in the relations of ordinary occurrences or even more strikingly. Brief and fragmentary as the Gospels appear, they are for nothing more wonderful than for the unity of their spirit. Like the remains of ancient statuary, broken and dismembered, but all revealing the spirit of true art, the Christian Records, apparently most defective in order and consistency, are found, upon the closest inspection, to be moulded by one only spirit, by minds singularly inspired with a love of truth. For my own part I cannot desire evidence more satisfactory than the whole structure of these books furnishes, that they are the compositions of good men and true. Some instances of the nature and force of this evidence I have already given. Our attention at present is occupied with those portions of these histories which record miracles, and I desire to show that like the rest of the narratives, they are covered with the deepest marks of truth.

We are familiar with the New Testament from our earliest years. If we have never conned it distastefully as a schoolbook, still it was put into our hands at so early a period that we have never fully apprehended the signs of truth which abound on every page. Other causes have conspired to hide from us its extraordinary characteristics as a true book. We have heard it extolled to the skies without any accurate discrimination of its merits. Accordingly it requires an effort to appreciate the singular simplicity which marks the

accounts of the miracles of Jesus. They have all the air of narratives of facts seen by the narrators' own eyes. Take the following examples.

“And behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.”

“And it came to pass the day after that he went into a city called, Nain; and many of his disciples went with him and much people. Now, when he came nigh to the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when Jesus saw her, he pitied her and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier; and they that bare it stood still. And he said, Young man, I command thee, arise! And he that was dead, sate up and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all; and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, that God hath visited his people.”

“And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus! Come forth! And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot in grave-clothes, and his face was bound round with a cloth. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.”

All the relations of the miracles are of this character. The awful wonders are described in the briefest manner, in words so few and simple that it seems as if the writers were strangely devoid of sensibility. They manifest no sense of the extraordinariness of the facts which they relate. But we judge very superficially when we draw such inferences from the briefness of these descriptions. We mistake the signs of deep feel-

ing. The deepest is always silent, or if it speaks, its utterances are never profuse. He who is profoundly moved feels the utter inadequacy of all words, and cannot endure to think that any terms of his are needed to set forth the truth or fact which moves him. It so completely fills his vision, that he deems the briefest hint sufficient. He feels that it would be an insult to the truth to asseverate and argue. He cannot do it. His absorbing sense of reality will not allow it. So, I conceive, it was, or so, at least, it appears to have been, with the New Testament historians. Suppose them to have witnessed these extraordinary occurrences, and it is impossible that they should have described them with a more entire truth of manner. Had they been telling what they knew was not real, or what they had some misgivings about, had they been inspired by any less profound feeling than a pure sense of truth, they would have tried to make up the deficiency by strong protestations, by reiteration, by enlarging upon the facts and soliciting attention and wonder. They do none of these things. They betray not the slightest anxiety to prove what they relate. They appear to know the facts to be real, overpoweringly real, and they leave them to speak for themselves. All that they could have said, beyond the simplest statement of the facts, would have seemed to them an irreverent, sacrilegious interruption of the Divine voice of truth which, clear and full, filled all their hearts, rendering all human language superfluous and vain. It is as if they said, "There are the facts. They speak for themselves. Just look at them and you must perceive as we do that they are real, and feel that our words are worthless. Shall we undertake laboriously to describe the sun shining there in the heavens? Look and you must see." In a word, the simplicity of these relations reveals the infinite confi-

dence of truth, rejecting the aids of language, and calm and silent in the consciousness of its own strength.

Another characteristic of the narratives of the miracles is their honesty. Not the slightest disposition is evinced to conceal or obscure the fact that, upon many who witnessed these things, no abiding impression was made. We are told that the wonderful effects produced by the word or the touch of Jesus, were attributed on the spot to the agency of evil spirits—that numbers went away without faith in him or in the divinity of his mission. Upon this trait of these histories I have already remarked at length. The greatest wonders are related. And in the same breath and with equal explicitness, we are told that those who stood by, and saw, and heard, either remained unchanged in their opinion of Jesus, or were confirmed in the belief that he was an impostor. These facts, apparently so inconsistent, not a word is uttered to reconcile.

There are here and there in the miraculous relations, peculiarities, forms of expression which produce the strongest impressions of truth.

Once, as we read, when Jesus raised to life a young female, he approached the bed where she lay, and said “‘Talitha-cumi,’ that is to say, ‘young maid! I say unto thee, arise!’” Again we are told that when a deaf man with an impediment in his speech was brought to Jesus, he “put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed and said unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened.”

Now supposing the authority of these accounts to be as yet unsettled, and our minds to be in suspense with respect to their truth, a curious question is suggested. How shall we account for the singular construction of these two relations? Why is it, for what end, with

what purpose did the narrator introduce the original in these two passages, the precise words of Jesus? They are not rare words, but among the commonest, and admit without the least difficulty of being translated. Nay, they are immediately translated. Why was the story told in this way? What is the cause of it? Admit these relations to be true, suppose the miraculous facts here described to have taken place, and then this peculiarity in the manner of stating the case is accounted for in a way wonderfully natural. If, in the first instance, the girl instantly came to life at the command of Jesus, and, in the other, the man immediately heard and saw, we see how natural it was that the very words, uttered by Jesus, and the utterance of which was followed by such startling effects, should have instantly appeared to the by-standers to be possessed of a supernatural and untranslatable significance. In the minds of the lookers on, those brief sounds must have instantly appeared to possess a force which no other words could convey. They no longer had any satisfactory correspondence with the sound of any other language. The narrators felt that no other form of speech could express the world of power, which the words of Jesus had, operating, as they did, like the charmed words of magic.* I confess that to my mind this explanation of the peculiar construction of these two accounts is decisive of their truth. It is a mark of truth, so natural and unconscious, that it weighs more in my estimation than a thousand express assertions of as many professed witnesses.

Again, in the narrative of the raising of Lazarus, there is a circumstance mentioned that produces a

* In like manner Shakspeare, with the miraculous truth of genius, preserves the '*Et tu, Brute,*' of Cesar, an exclamation, consecrated by the fearful juncture at which it was uttered, and not to be translated.

similar impression of reality. I allude to it elsewhere for a different purpose. Immediately upon the appearance of Lazarus issuing from the sepulchre, bound from head to foot in the shroud and with the cloth over his face, we read, "Jesus said, Loose him and let him go." Now why, we ask, was this particular introduced, apparently so insignificant? Admit the truth of the miracle, and a world of naturalness is laid bare in these few words. If Lazarus really appeared at the mouth of the tomb, the crowd must have been transfixed with awe and terror, and Lazarus left to struggle and stagger unaided in the ample folds of the shroud, blindfolded by the cloth round his face. How natural is it that Jesus, the only one present, calm and self-possessed, should have been the first to observe his situation, and should have directed those who stood by to go to the assistance of Lazarus. This circumstance at first sight so trifling, this brief direction of Jesus to those around him, furnishes evidence the most decisive, because purely incidental, of the reality of the restoration of the dead man. It is as the finger of God, lifting up a corner of the veil, and laying bare before us the divine reality. *Ex pede Herculem.*

Others of the miraculous relations may be mentioned which bear, in a similar way, particular marks in addition to a general air of truth. Jesus is related to have restored a blind man to sight in the vicinity of Jericho, and the blind man is said to have called out to Jesus by the appellation, 'Son of David.' Suppose the account to be true, and a touching trait of nature is revealed in the use of this title by the blind man, a title appropriated in the Jewish mind, to the Messiah, who, it was believed, would be a descendant of David. Jesus had not announced himself as the Messiah. The people were beginning to surmise that he was that

Prophet. But there was so much in him that did not correspond to their idea of the Christ, that they hesitated to believe that Jesus was he. But the blind man did not hesitate. He addressed him at once as the Messiah. Suffering under a sore misfortune, the beggar was naturally disposed far more than others to feel the force of the evidence which Jesus gave of his authority, and to think lightly of the circumstances that seemed to weaken that evidence. He had heard that Jesus had wrought wonderful cures—had restored sight to the blind. And what cared he for the want of conformity in the outward appearance of the Nazarene with popular expectation. If he dwelt upon the thoughts of the Messiah, it was because when the Messiah should come, he would be restored to sight. He had heard that Jesus had cured blindness with a word. That was enough for him. That proved him to be the Son of David. In like manner the possessed or deranged persons whom Jesus relieved, accosted him, as soon as they came into his presence, without hesitation as the Christ, the Son of God. How natural was it for persons in their situation to leap at once to a conclusion, and to give free and reckless expression to a conviction, which there was so much in the circumstances of the occasion to warrant! Be it remarked that the histories state only the naked fact, that the demoniacs so entitled Jesus. They make no comment, offer no explanation to show how natural it was that they should have so addressed him.

These circumstances, apparently insignificant, are the very features of truth. What form and colour are to the eye, these are to the discerning mind. I am utterly unable to conceive how, supposing the events related in the New Testament, really to have occurred, they could have been told in a manner more thoroughly

in accordance with the principles of human nature generally, and the particular circumstances of the case. In my apprehension these simple histories are a perfect model of truth-telling, a complete illustration of the true way of relating facts. They show themselves to be inspired, plenarily inspired, in the only consistent sense which I am able to attach to the doctrine of Inspiration. That is, they owe their form to the reality of the things they relate, in other words, to truth—to God, to no device or imagination of man. But let us turn now from the manner and form of these relations to the wonders they describe.

Here lies the impregnable argument for the reality of the miracles, in the miracles themselves, in their perfect harmony with the character of him to whom they are ascribed.

If they are not true accounts, but fabrications or exaggerated statements of ordinary events, they must violate grossly the moral unity of his being, whose acts they are asserted to be. The general features of his character, as all confess, are grand and noble. His miracles apart, he has neither said nor done any thing at variance with a nature singularly simple, generous and venerable. We could not indeed have ventured to tell beforehand the course such a being might pursue, the precise acts he would perform. But when certain things are attributed to him, we may determine whether they are in keeping with his character. We can form no idea of the possible works of any great artist, painter or poet. We cannot dream even of the forms in which his genius will delight or awe us. "Every genius is an impossibility till he appears. We should not call him new and original, if we saw where

his marble was lying and what fabric he could rear from it." But when a work of art is placed before us, it is within our ability to ascertain its genuineness. Through a kindred spirit, and by dint of critical study, we may discover whether it breathes the spirit and bears the likeness of the mind from which it professes to have sprung. The decision may not be in all cases equally easy. But in the case with which we are now concerned, it is neither difficult, nor doubtful. Independently of the miracles ascribed to Jesus Christ, we know enough of him to form a distinct idea of his moral lineaments, of the pervading tone of his character. We know its leading traits; or, at least, we know abundantly enough of him to be instantly struck with the contrast between him and the miracles, if those miracles are nothing more than common events distorted by accident, ignorance or fraud, or pure fabrications of the craving for the wonderful.

This now may be affirmed. Were the miracles Jesus is said to have wrought, only ordinary occurrences exaggerated, or mere fictions, they would at once appear, in their real character. They would have, and would instantly be felt to have, no living connexion with him. As well might you mistake the fetters fastened upon a man, for natural parts of him, living members of his living body, as such fabrications for the acts of Jesus; or as easily mix the coarsest pebbles with the finest diamonds, and pretend there was no telling them apart.

And here it strengthens this statement to remark, in passing, that as the authors of the Christian Records have not studied consistency, as they show not the faintest appearance of having been biased in the selection or relation of the details of their histories, by any anxiety for the effect those details might have on the

moral unity of Jesus, we may consider the accounts of the miracles, supposing them to be false, as neither qualified nor shaped in order to their being made consistent with his character. They are given, we may infer, in all their native extravagance. If misrepresentations, then are they gross misrepresentations; if effusions of the passion for the marvellous, then no cunning has been used to give them shaping and consistency. As far as it goes, the ignorance or the deception is thorough-going and unqualified. I repeat, therefore, were they really false, their falsehood would be palpable in their utter want of keeping with him to whom they are referred. They would break in upon his individuality, and this so rudely, that, like the apocryphal miracles, they would long ago have lost all credit, falling out of the text and mouldering into oblivion.

It seems never worthily to have been considered to what a decisive test the miracles of the New Testament are subjected by their avowed connexion with him, by being explicitly referred to his agency. They are thus placed in relations, by which their falsehood, were they false, must be glaringly exposed. In defending them, it is customary to lay great stress upon the circumstance that they took place openly, in the light of day. But the presumption of their truth, resulting from this consideration, is not a thousandth part so strong as that afforded by their juxta-position to the penetrating illumination of the character of Christ. Purporting to be his acts, they are placed at once in the very focus of the strongest light ever yet poured on the eyes of man. And were they mere earthly exhalations, they would have been dissipated long ago, or they would have remained only to be exposed in their real nature by a light above the brightness of the sun. In professing to be the works of one not unknown to

us, and, so far as known, seen to possess decisive and original qualities of mind, they furnish us with the means of trying their truth by their correspondence with the truth in him.

They have stood this test. Whatever repugnance may sometimes have been expressed or felt at the bare idea of representing Jesus as a Wonder-worker, when the particular miracles ascribed to him are fairly considered, no one can say that they violate his moral consistency, or are obviously not of a piece with him. No man can read the account of the raising of Lazarus, for instance, and say, that, supposing this event to have taken place just as it is represented, it outrages our idea of him. We are not shocked by any want of fitness to our conception of Jesus. There is nothing here little or puerile. As much may be said of nearly all the accounts of his miracles. Let us be as skeptically inclined as you please, still they do not create that instantaneous and unequivocal feeling of a want of keeping, which would be produced, were they mere fictions or misrepresentations. Here is a most important consideration. Most remarkable is it that the stories of the miracles do not do gross violence to the general tenor of the history. No seam appears. In this way a very strong presumption, all but decisive, is created in their favour. It should at least insure them our awakened and respectful attention.

But this is not all. It is only the foreshadow of the argument in their behalf. Not only do they not mar the wholeness of his character, whose works they are declared to be, they positively illustrate it. They actually disclose the inmost principles of his being. Of all the words and deeds attributed to him, his miracles are, by far, the most splendid illustrations of the laws and order of his inner life. As they are novel, they are

supernatural. They are above what we have witnessed of nature. Still they are not nonnatural, but eminently and emphatically natural. They contain and exhibit a new and abundant measure of the finest spirit of Nature.

It is common to speak of man in the rudest state as in a state of nature. But this representation has very fairly been objected to ; and it has been asserted, on the other hand, that the true state of nature is disclosed in man elevated with all his faculties fully developed. Accordingly in the finished man, nature is most expressively revealed, and her profoundest laws demonstrated. And those of his works, which illustrate his highest powers, are precisely the most natural manifestations of his being, and the most luminous facts in nature. I say again, then, the miracles of Jesus are, in the fullest sense of the word, natural facts. And just so far as their naturalness is felt, they are felt to be supernatural also, new facts in nature, brought within the sphere of our observation, in advance of all our previous knowledge, but not inconsistent with it, of a seamless piece with nature, irradiated by her brightest lights, revealing the divinity that stirs within her.

To illustrate and fortify the ground now taken, we must analyze the miracles of Christ, an arduous labour. Of the most familiar appearances we know but little. We acquire but a superficial acquaintance with the most common facts. We penetrate but a little way into their meaning, as symbols of the all-informing spirit. With regard, therefore, to any new manifestations of Power, it is not at a glance that our dim eyes can trace the characteristics of their origin, the features of their noble descent. Thousands in all ages have felt that the Christian Miracles bear the impress of the divinity that inspires all nature. And this feeling

has been too strong to be much weakened by any mechanical theories, based upon false analogies, any narrow speculations concerning the philosophy of these new facts. Still it will yet be long before we learn to conceive of them aright, and to describe them with any degree of logical correctness. What ages does it take for the higher productions of the human mind to be worthily apprehended ! For a long period, genius passes for madness, and works, profoundly true, and of the closest accordance with nature, are accounted the wildest aberrations. So when the Infinite Mind, in the direct and unbroken march of its august purposes, presents before mortal eyes, new forms of its power, man, in his ignorance, for centuries, pronounces them undoubted violations of the ordinary course of things. The understanding is for a while baffled, unable to identify the footsteps of the Infinite. Yet the heart beats and burns in undefined sympathy therewith. How great the labour to discover and define the divine laws which the works of Jesus demonstrate, and by which they are proved to be in perfect keeping with all these other and familiar works and ways of Nature, between which and them, however, there is at the same time a mighty interval ! We can cast only feeble glances into this great depth.

Before I proceed further let me repeat what has been said, somewhat more briefly. My meaning may be illustrated thus. Were a man of extraordinary genius now living, and astonishing the world with the displays of his power, we could not guess in what particular shape his spirit would disport itself. But if, after various productions of excelling beauty, he should send forth a new work, not only far surpassing the works of all others, but even all his own previous achievements, thousands probably would cry, "Inspi-

ration! A miracle!" while some would account it a mere effusion of enthusiasm without form or consistency. Of those who felt its beauty, how few would be able to distinguish the nature of the power that moved them! Only after the lapse of time, and numberless theories, and an infinite variety of opinion and controversy would it begin to be discovered by the world, that what seemed so wild was in reality fashioned after the perfect model of Truth; what appeared so monstrous was a genuine production of nature, formed of her finest stuff and in her most exquisite mould. So is it with the miracles of Jesus. They are new works of God; and, so far in advance are they of all the other works of nature, so penetrated with the divine spirit, that we cannot wonder that man, "the earth-blinded," is slow to conceive of them aright—to read these new and mighty signs.

The first aspect under which they may be viewed, is in their relation to the great purpose which they have served, the establishment of Christianity. However they are conceived of, it is not to be disputed that they had a place and performed a part in the communication of truth from Heaven. Whatever the precise position they occupy, whether otherwise in harmony with it or not, they are evidently portions of the divine edifice, and, viewed in this relation, they are felt to be worthy of Christ and of God. In this connexion they are generally acknowledged to be in accordance with the spirit of nature's laws, although they are regarded as violating them in the letter. The end of Nature's order, it is said, is mind, moral and intellectual good. Consequently since, by confirming Christianity, the miracles contributed to the interests of mind, they are felt in this respect to concur with nature.

In saying that the miracles attested the Christian

Revelation, I would not be understood to assent to that opinion which represents this as their special design. I presume not to define the particular end they were intended to serve. We may perceive many purposes answered by them, but what was their special purpose, I venture not to state. I cannot sympathise with the confidence, with which many undertake to tell what is the intended end of any event, even the humblest. It may hardly seem to suit a grave discussion, but I cannot avoid quoting the happy phrase of the Abbé Correa, who styled the seekers after final causes, "the coffee-house politicians of Heaven," persons, who, in an obscure corner of the Universe, presume to fathom all the designs of the controlling power, and to tell precisely the purpose aimed at by every movement that occurs. According to these philosophers, the manifest use of that provision by which *rain* is produced,—the very thing for which it was contrived, is, to fertilise the ground. Consequently the rain that falls into the sea and upon the desert, 'where no man is,' is forthwith pronounced a comparative waste, an accidental effect of a general law. And yet it is in the highest degree probable that the showers, which mingle with the ocean, or water only the wilderness, are ministering to some vast physical process, which shall be productive of benefits in comparison with which the fertilising of the now-existing earth is a trifle and accident. Again. The received hypothesis concerning the admirable fuel which contributes so much to our comfort, is, that it is of vegetable origin, the product of a process undergone by the boundless forests of the antediluvian world. To an observer at that early period, antecedent to the existence of our race, that huge vegetable growth, needed neither for ships nor houses, would have seemed but the accidental result

of a general law of vegetation. And yet when we observe to what numberless purposes of art and comfort, the *coal*, composed out of those very forests, now ministers, we cannot avoid the conviction that their growth was any thing rather than a matter of accident. Once more, a gentleman, injured by the upsetting of the vehicle in which he was riding on a public road in England, was carried into a house where he became acquainted with a lady whom he subsequently married. From that union descended George Washington.* Nothing can appear more truly accidental than the position of the stone upon the highway, which, by overturning a carriage, led to so important an event. And yet, looking at the result, why might we not find here, as well as elsewhere, a final cause of the law of gravitation? In view of cases of this kind, which may be adduced without number, I confess myself wholly unable to put my finger on the main purpose of any occurrence, however insignificant, and say, 'This is what it was meant for and nothing else.' It would rather seem that every particle of the great whole exists for an end, indefinable, inconceivable. And hence it is that every thing contains an infinity of uses and serves purposes that defy enumeration.

While therefore I concede that the miracles of Christ have contributed to a great religious revolution, to the confirmation of a divine communication, I venture not to assert that this was their special purpose, and that every other aspect of them is accidental and secondary. It is true he pointed to his works as attestations of his authority, and his authority they do attest, indubitably. But it does not follow that this was the sole, or the chief, end for which they were wrought.

* This anecdote, related by an English author, has sufficient probability to answer the purpose of illustration.

Nevertheless, in confirming faith and promoting the interests of mind, they obviously correspond with the aims of Nature, and, in this respect are natural occurrences.

The miracles of Jesus, with scarcely an exception, were immediately beneficent. They were acts of benevolence done to the suffering. Not selfish were they but generous. They tended directly to bless. In this respect also they harmonise with the arrangements of nature. All aim at the production of good. But here again it may not be affirmed that they took place chiefly for the sake of those whom they immediately benefited. Jesus healed the body; he impressed the mind. Both these were results which, we may fairly suppose, he contemplated; but were it to appear that the influence of these extraordinary facts was confined to either or both of these things, they would lack correspondence with the works and ways of nature. In these last, as I have said, we can see an infinity of purposes answered. But *the* purpose of any one thing is absolutely incomprehensible. It can neither be defined in words nor measured by the understanding. And on this account, as not only the whole, but the least part of the whole, exists for an infinite end, every part is inexhaustible in its uses.

Another characteristic of the wonderful effects recorded as produced by Jesus, which goes to reveal still more clearly their correspondence with the workings of nature, is the circumstance that they were produced *by the agency of means*. I beg the attention of the reader to this point. It is continually asserted that the miracles of Christ were the *immediate* effects of the power of God. But this assertion is directly

contradicted by the records themselves. The wonderful phenomena presented in the life of Jesus, were produced *mediately* not immediately. Means were used, simple, but still, strictly speaking, means. Jesus declared his works to be the works of the Father, 'dwelling in him' and working through him,—by means of his faith, his will, the touch of his hand, and the sound of his voice. Every where throughout the universe, phenomena are consequent upon the instrumentality of means. No where does God act immediately. Nor is he represented as acting immediately in the miracles of the New Testament. The case of the blind man who was restored to sight gradually, to whose eyes Jesus twice applied saliva, as, after the first application, he could distinguish men from trees only by their motion, is a most striking instance of the employment of means in the production of the Christian miracles. At another time he used a similar method, in the case of a man born blind, whose eyes he anointed with saliva, and bade him go and wash in the pool of Siloam. In yet another case, when a deaf man with an impediment in his speech was brought to him, he spat and touched the man's tongue, and put his fingers into his ears, and so restored his powers of hearing and speech. And in all cases it will be found that means were employed. There was always the hand or the voice of Jesus, his actual presence or the exciting rumour of him. He was directly or indirectly the medium, through which the power operated that produced these wonderful effects.

The fact, of which I now speak, has either been unnoticed or misconceived. The remarkable simplicity of the manner of Jesus as a wonder-worker could not be, and has not been, overlooked. It has been seen that he used no conjuror's arts, no Abracadabra, no

muttering of barbarous spells, no magical implements, no affectation of mystery, no cloud of secrecy. Still the means which he did use, simple as they were in comparison with the fantastic and imposing artifices of all other wonder-workers, have not been seen to differ, as they do, in kind as well as in form, from magical formulas. They are conceived of as operating in the same way, as holding precisely the same mystical relation to the effects by which they were followed, as do the muttering and the wand, and the strange characters and circles of an enchanter to the wonders he evokes. In a word the *modus* of the miracles of Jesus is, in the popular apprehension, inscrutable and mysterious exactly in the same sense in which the incantations of sorcery are mysterious.

Now I affirm, that, so far as we may judge from the manner of Jesus in the doing of his miracles, the methods which he employed are no otherwise mysterious than are all means. In the commonest processes of Nature the efficacy of means is inscrutable. How light is the means of vision, or sound of sense, we know not. We observe the facts, and, were they not so familiar, they would overpower us with wonder. When Jesus wrought a miracle, he assumed no unusual attitude; he put on no particular garb; he waved no Aaron's rod; he affected no peculiarity of manner of speech. As he spoke, as he walked, as he breathed, so he appears to have performed miracles with the same entire simplicity. To his mind, so I gather from the Records, a miracle was like any other event, just as natural; and he appears to have expected to be heard by the dead, when he addressed the dead, with the same almost unconscious faith, with which he expected to be heard by the living, when his words were addressed to the living. He did not extend his hand

to lay it upon the head of a little child, more simply and naturally than he stretched it forth to touch and cure the leper or the blind.

Here it is that a very great peculiarity of the miracles attributed to Jesus Christ has never yet been distinctly perceived. The way in which he is recorded to have wrought them has been observed to differ from that of all other wonder-workers, but only in respect of a certain simple brevity. My meaning is, that the methods of Jesus in working miracles have, in popular estimation, no relation to the effects produced but as magical spells or charms. These methods are commonly conceived of as mere pretences, having only an artificial connexion with their extraordinary results, and employed, not as instruments, but merely with a view to the spectators. When, for instance, Jesus stood before the open grave of his deceased friend, and cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus! come forth!" this articulate utterance, this loud voice, this direct address to the dead man—all this is not understood as the *bona fide* sign and means of the power, by which the individual addressed was awakened from the sleep of the grave, but only as a show, used for the sake of the by-standers, the miracle being considered as wrought, not by means of the voice of Jesus, but by an act of divine power, extraneous and wholly independent of him. So again when he extended his hand, and touched the leper, this movement is not seen as the simple prompting of his will, operating to its end, with wonderful power indeed, but still like all other means. The methods of Jesus being thus erroneously conceived of, it is virtually denied that his miracles were wrought as the history gives it to appear that they were. And, if the prevalent idea be correct, it would have been in

stricter agreement with the actual fact, if, instead of that loud command, addressed directly to Lazarus, he had prayed to God to work the wonder, and referred the attention of the spectators to that Divine Agency, which, as it is commonly understood, was not exerted in, and through, the will and voice of Jesus, but extra-neously and coincidently. But never, at any time, did he make any such reference. On the contrary he never, on any occasion, spake with a more decisive tone of personal authority than when he performed miracles. "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," said the leper to him. Mark the reply of Jesus. It is not "God wills," but "*I* will: Be thou clean!" Never king upon a throne spake from such a clear consciousness of personal power as appears to have inspired the will and the voice of Jesus, when he bade the blind to see, the leper to be cleansed, the impotent man to rise up and walk, the winds and waves to be still, and the dead to rise. "Young man!" said he to the dead son of the widow of Nain, "*I* say unto thee!" (i. e. *I* command thee!) "Arise!" In the same way he addressed the daughter of Jairus.

It is of the first importance to a correct understanding of this great subject of the Miracles, that this feature of them, which I am now endeavouring to exhibit, should be fully considered. Hitherto it has been entirely overlooked. Admit the facts to have occurred as they are represented, then were they the works of God. But they were not immediate acts of the Supreme. There was here, as in all things else, the instrumentality of means. So far then, there was not only no violation of the order of nature, but a manifest observance of her method.

But it will be objected that the means employed

were obviously so inadequate—the disproportion between them and the phenomena produced was so great, that they are to be accounted as nothing.

To this, I reply, that all means, when duly meditated, appear utterly inadequate, wholly disproportionate to the effects by which they are followed. It is strange indeed that miracles so imposing should have been wrought by methods so simple, that a dead body should awake and come forth out of the grave at the brief bidding of a human voice, that a loathsome disease should vanish at the touch of a human hand. But the voice and the hand are perpetually working miracles, even in the commonest movements ; and how the utterance of a few, feeble articulate sounds should act upon the living, how the human hand communicates motion to the smallest particle of matter—these are things which reveal a supernatural, invisible force. The most familiar effects of the voice and the hand are inscrutable, and, strictly considered, are literal miracles, phenomena, manifesting a mysterious power of unascertained limits. All sights and sounds, all sensible appearances, are signs of an unseen, indefinable force, an infinite, ever active spirit in the centre and essence of things ; and we are justified in looking for new manifestations, new signs of the Infinite one, only it must be our care not to mistake the fictions of man for the workings of God.

But it will again be urged that the means employed in the working of the Christian miracles were, not merely inadequate, disproportionate to their results, as all means are, but were such means as have never before nor since produced like effects.

This objection will be best met by considering what the means actually were, that were used in and by Jesus of Nazareth. Thus far I have only stated the

fact that means were employed. I proceed now to inquire into their nature, to ascertain, if I may, the character of the conditions under which the Christian miracles were wrought. In the course of this inquiry, still more powerful evidence will be disclosed in their favour, as actual facts, corresponding with all the ways and works of God in nature and providence. The means by which they were wrought, I have already stated briefly to be the Faith, the will, the hand and voice of Jesus. The principal instrument was Faith.

In previous attempts to elucidate this subject, I fear I have spoken of faith in a manner not sufficiently perspicuous. I have represented, or appeared to represent it, as the *cause* of the miraculous effects produced by Jesus. This is erroneous. The very term, faith, implies the existence of an antecedent object of faith. To believe necessarily involves the idea of some power or force to be believed in. And then again, admit the extraordinary events related in the Gospels to have actually *been*, and they must be referred to that invisible, unknown, undefined Power which we denominate God, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things, as their absolute, ultimate cause—*causa causans*. Faith was the cause of the miracles only in a secondary sense, only as a condition or means essential in the constitution of things. The miracles as facts, like all things else from the highest to the lowest, even to the falling of a sparrow, must, upon every theory of the case, be referred to the invisible cause of all causes, living in all life, moving in all motion, and operating in the miracles, as it always operates, through means, by the instrumentality of faith especially. And the doctrine which I exhibit, and believe reason and Scripture to warrant, is, that the miracles, like all facts, manifest order and law, that

every particular of their occurrence, so far as the history has given us information, shows us the Supreme Cause acting in and by Jesus Christ, as it ever acts, in perfect harmony with itself, with the nature of Jesus, and the whole constitution of things. One of the chief considerations that justify this belief is that the miracles were consequent upon the exercise of Faith, that a certain mental state was the condition upon which they occurred. This we learn from the express language and the general tenor of the Scriptures.

When the man, who brought his sick child to Jesus, said, 'If thou art able to do any thing for us, help us,' Jesus replied, "'If thou art able!' Do thou believe. He who believeth is able to do all things."* Again and again he declared to his disciples, that, if they only had faith, they might uproot trees and overturn mountains by a word. When they asked why they could not cast out the evil spirit that possessed the child just mentioned, his answer was, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting," by which I understand (and I know not how else it can be understood,) 'you cannot subdue and command a disease so frightful and intimidating in its appearance, except by a force of faith attainable only by the strictest self-discipline.' He repeatedly told those whom he relieved that their faith it was that healed them, that the effect produced was 'according to their faith.' "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" inquired he of the blind men who besought him to restore them to sight. When Peter attempted to walk on the water and was begin-

* That is, so the reply of Jesus should be understood, 'What do you mean by asking if I am able? Do you believe? All things are possible, &c.' This I believe to be the true meaning of the original. In the passage, as it stands in our common version, the force of the words '*u dyasai*,' and '*τα δυνατα*,' is wholly overlooked.

ning to sink, Jesus caught him and said, "O thou of little faith! wherefore didst thou doubt?" And just before he summoned Lazarus from the grave, he made that remarkable declaration, "Whoso *believeth* in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whoso liveth and believeth in me shall never die." These various and emphatic passages certainly intimate very strongly the importance of faith to the miraculous effects produced by Jesus.

But how—in what sense was faith important. Was it that Jesus accounted it *meritorious* and that he wrought miracles only for the deserving? This idea is countenanced neither by true religion nor sound philosophy. It was for the unworthy that he lived and died. Not the righteous but sinners came he to call to repentance. Faith is not a merit, but a privilege, an exceeding great reward in itself. Was the demand for faith then an arbitrary requisition, a mere caprice, having no foundation in nature? So it must be esteemed—there is no other alternative—if no natural, vital connexion is supposable between it and those miracles to which it was so repeatedly pronounced preliminary. It is a divine trait of the words of Jesus that they express truths, facts, which, the more they are studied, are found to be not the creations of a solitary mind, but truths, existing from eternity. Hence he declared that his teaching was not his, but God's. It was not the offspring of his own mind. It was true independently of him. If it be supposed that, although he laid so much stress upon faith, it still was not naturally, essentially necessary, that it sustained no natural relation to the effects to which he so frequently represented it as conditional, then there is no test of the truth of these declarations concerning faith, and they are undistinguishable from

the fictions of a mere human mind. I do not say that we must be able to trace the vital tie between faith and the miracles, but that we must suppose the requisition of faith to be based upon the existence of such a connexion. Otherwise, the requisition was purely arbitrary.

That faith was insisted upon, because it was, in the nature of things, a necessary condition of the miracles, is a conclusion urged upon us by all our observation of human nature. It is a universal law of our being that we must believe in our power before we can exercise it. Whatever force there is in us, depends for its developement upon faith. Before we can act we must believe in our own ability. And if we act feebly or wholly fail, it is not so much because power is wanting, as confidence. Men are continually surprised at the discovery of faculties in themselves, degrees of force, which they never dreamed they possessed, till some emergency, pressing on them the necessity of exertion, has created a sudden confidence in their own power. The sight of her child in peril has urged many a mother to superhuman efforts. Indeed very extraordinary and quite miraculous efforts have been produced in this way. Stimulated by unexpected circumstances, the mind has been made conscious of itself, awakened to a just self-confidence, by which it has been prompted to efforts so novel and great that it has deemed itself moved by a force not its own. A volume might be filled with well attested cases of instantaneous and astonishing cures thus wrought. It is needless to dwell upon this class of facts. They are familiar to all. They indicate the existence of unknown forces in the human mind, or, to express the fact in a different form, they show that such is the constitution of man, that, under certain conditions, the divine force may

operate in and through him, in new ways and unprecedented degrees. No limits can be assigned to the demonstrations of power possible by faith.

The application of these remarks to the extraordinary effects produced by Jesus of Nazareth will appear upon a more particular examination of his miracles.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE MIRACLES.

PART II.

"His language was action, and his action language."

CH. EXAMINER.

THERE are about thirty different miracles recorded in the Gospels with more or less minuteness. A number no doubt occurred, which are not particularly mentioned, but not many. Here and there we meet with a general statement that Jesus healed all manner of sickness and went about working miracles. But if only as many actually took place as are particularly related, these general statements are perfectly natural. Were there an individual now living who had performed only a few wonderful works, he would be described as doing all sorts of marvels.

Upon an examination of the records, the impression is produced that the miracles of Jesus were more numerous at the commencement of his career than at any subsequent period. When he first came forth "in the power of the spirit," and with full faith in his singular gifts, he used his power freely and without constraint. But he soon saw what a tremendous excitement

it caused, an excitement, before which he was compelled once and again to retire and hide himself for a while in the wilderness. He never appears anxious for opportunities of displaying his divine powers. And here is a general feature of his character as a doer of miracles, which is unspeakably impressive. Not only was there in his manner nothing of the air of an exhibiter, he showed no undue solicitude to exercise his gifts and vindicate his mission. His benevolence, active and comprehensive as it was, never betrayed him into excess in the use of his power. He always employs it with entire simplicity and naturalness, like all his other faculties. The harmony of his nature, a nature composed of rare and new elements, is most wonderful.

But leaving all general remarks, I proceed to consider some of his miracles somewhat at length.

I. THE LEPER.

After the delivery of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus descended, followed by "great multitudes." He had previously wrought wonders, as we learn from the 4th chapter of Matthew. He was met on this occasion by a man suffering under the terrible disease of leprosy. The leper addressed him, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. Jesus put forth his hand and touched him, saying, 'I will : Be thou clean.' And immediately his leprosy vanished."

To form any thing like an adequate picture of this incident, we must bring into view that immense crowd, heaving like a sea under the emotions of wonder and awe which Jesus, the central figure, had awakened. The exalted idea which every individual of that throng had of him was magnified, and rendered vivid and

glowing beyond all description by the magic power of sympathy. In the eyes of the poor wretch, cursed with a disease which cut him off from all human fellowship, the figure of Jesus must have dilated, and he must have appeared a very God, not "like a formal man." So much we must infer from a general view of the occasion. The manner in which the leper addressed Jesus confirms the inference, and reveals the great idea he had formed of his power. "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." ' Words cannot describe the state of the leper's mind, the reverence, confidence, faith with which he must have been inspired so to address one, to all outward appearance, a fellow man, to express such a belief, that a simple act of the will of Jesus could cure him ! With what indescribable looks and tones must the utterance of this conviction have been accompanied ! With what soul-absorbing earnestness must he have watched to see what Jesus would do ! The least movement of Jesus, the parting of his lips to speak, the raising of his hand, even before the leper felt its awful touch, must have thrilled his whole frame, like an electric shock. And when that hand was extended towards him, and that voice rung clear, "I will : Be thou clean," he must have felt as if God in all his power were descending upon him. The voice and the touch penetrated like lightning, into the inmost fountains of his life, and, through the close but mysterious connexion of the mind and body, caused a sudden developement of vital power. The hidden forces of Nature, thus authoritatively summoned, produced instantaneous soundness. By his word and touch, the perfect faith of Jesus in his own power, operated upon the already powerful faith of the leper and quickened it to the necessary action.

Believing that the mind is not a property of the body,

but, consciously or unconsciously, its life-spring, I have no power to question the reality of this incident, when all its circumstances are faithfully considered, the extreme misery of the leper, the idea he had of Jesus, the presence of a mass of men trembling, gazing, crowding, the majestic bearing of the man of Nazareth and his tone of kingly authority. If men afflicted with severe diseases, have been instantaneously relieved by being thrown into sudden danger, surely there was enough here to operate with extraordinary power and to produce a corresponding effect on the frame of the leper.

II. THE CENTURION'S SERVANT.

This case differs from the one just considered, but it admits of being viewed in a similar way.

The Centurion was popular among the Jews. He had built them a synagogue ; a fact which justifies the belief that he held the religion of Moses in great respect. If not a proselyte, he was evidently a man of no common degree of religious sensibility, naturally disposed to credit the wonderful things related of the extraordinary man of Nazareth. A favourite servant or child of his lay sick of palsy, a nervous disease, upon which the mind acts with obvious readiness. Intelligence was brought to the house of sickness that the Wonder-worker, about whom the whole country was in a flame, was in the neighbourhood. It is instantly proposed to send and request him to come and relieve the sick child. The bare proposal could not but affect the susceptible mind of the sick youth, who, as he was beloved by the Centurion, must have been possessed of a like sensibility. Shortly the messengers return with the intelligence that they had seen Jesus and spoken to

him, and that he had consented to come. Probably they were among the spectators when he healed the leper. At least they must have heard of fresh wonders wrought by him, which they, no doubt, mentioned with all the exciting expressions of wonder, in the presence of the sick boy, whom all naturally sought to cheer. Can it be doubted whether these things had a tendency to animate his languishing mind and body? Is it at all probable that they called forth from the Centurion, even before he went to Jesus and while he was at the side of the sick bed, no imposing expression of that confidence in the power of Jesus which was so great that it astonished Jesus himself? He must have started up, I conceive, and, with every look and tone of perfect faith, exclaimed "He shall not come! I am not worthy that he should come under my roof." The susceptible mind of the young sufferer, naturally deferring to the authority of his beloved master, must have been moved to no common degree. His cure, we may believe, was begun even before the Centurion quitted the house. Well did Jesus say, in view of the singularly powerful faith of the Roman, "*According to thy faith*, be it done unto thee." He who knew from his own consciousness, the omnipotence of faith, saw that under these circumstances the youth *must* be cured, and his own personal attendance was unnecessary. Faith, as a grain of mustard seed, he again and again declared, would work the greatest wonders. Not in that small degree did it exist in the Centurion. It had sprung up there, like a very tree of life, and the heart of the child was as a decaying branch drawing new strength from the parent stock.

In order to estimate this and nearly all the miracles aright, we must keep steadily in mind the extraordinary sensation which the appearance, words and works of

Jesus, had produced throughout the country ; and consider how the heart of man answereth to man, so that a deep feeling spreads like an epidemic, and, although it may die out at any moment, yet, while it lasts, fuses all hearts into one. "There is a sympathy in heaped masses of men : nay, are not mankind, in whole, like tuned strings, and a cunning infinite concordance and unity ; you smite one string, and all strings will begin sounding." It is related that the disciples of Jesus informed him on one occasion that they had seen a man casting out evil spirits in his name, and they had forbidden him. "Forbid him not," said their master, "for there is no man who shall do a miracle in my name that can lightly speak evil of me." What an impression had gone abroad of the power of Jesus ! Here was a person, not one of his regular followers, a stranger, who had conceived such an idea of him, that he believed he could expel the evil spirits, by which the insane were supposed to be possessed, by the simple utterance of the awful name of Jesus of Nazareth. Whether he succeeded or not does not decisively appear. It would seem, on the whole, that he was successful. Jesus truly said that it was impossible for one, who had formed such an idea of him as to attempt to work miracles with his name, to speak of him slightly. The success of this man only corroborates our belief in the power of Jesus. What must he have been the bare utterance of whose name by a believing stranger could quell the fury of madness !

III. THE SYRO-PHENICIAN WOMAN'S DAUGHTER.

I turn to this miracle next, on account of its similarity to the last, the cure being effected without any immediate connexion between Jesus and the sufferer.

At the moment the Syro-Phenician woman came to him, he was striving to escape public notice and avoid the machinations of his enemies. This explains his disregard of her petition. He naturally supposed that she wished him to go with her to her home, to cure her child. Let it be remembered that the faith of the Centurion astonished him. He was not prepared to find faith so great as to render his personal presence unnecessary, and his impression was that to grant the woman's prayer would require him to accompany her to the spot where her child was. This at that moment he could not do. He had a great work on hand, and he did not feel himself authorised to spend his time and power in merely going about here and there to heal the sick. His own country was the sphere of his labours. He had a duty to discharge to his own people, which required him at that juncture to avoid public notice. If it should be thought that his disregard of this petitioner argued a want of benevolence, I should rather deem it a proof of his extraordinary prudence and self-command, and freedom from all desire of display, since it involved the relinquishment of an opportunity of exhibiting his miraculous power. To his disciples who begged him to send the woman away, he said, "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," i. e. 'My work is here, and among my own countrymen, and it requires me at this juncture to escape public notice. It would not be right for me to listen to such calls upon my time and power, as carry me away from my appointed sphere.'

Still the woman, strong in faith, and a mother's heart, was not to be put off. She threw herself at his feet, and urged her prayer. To her he said, "The children must first be filled. It is not right to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs." This

language sounds very harsh, but let us consider the circumstances.

It is true the world was the field of Jesus. The blessing he brought was for all mankind. But for the world's sake, it was necessary that his light should be poured upon one spot, that it might thence radiate to all places and times. The sphere of his personal labours was his country. There the flame was to be kindled which was to spread over the whole earth. He was not to travel into foreign lands, or to go beyond the boundaries of his own nation. Had he done so, his life would have been spent in vain, and no one deep and enduring impression would have been made. Hence he did not feel himself under an obligation to obey the calls of benevolence beyond the appointed sphere in which he was sent to act. Besides, on the present occasion, he had a special reason for disregarding the petition of the poor woman. He was evidently in haste, to escape notice. "He would have no man know him." He did not wish to be recognised. His time and his work would not allow him to go with the woman to heal her child. And therefore he paid no attention to her. But when she threw herself before him at his feet, then it was necessary to take some notice of her, and he said, "The children must first be filled. It is not right to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs." This language implies at first sight that he regarded Gentiles as but dogs in comparison with his own countrymen. But it must be recollected that the Jews entitled Gentiles, 'sinners,' 'dogs.' This was a common appellation. *And terms and names, offensive and opprobrious when first employed, by frequent use lose their force and become mere terms of designation.* The phraseology which Jesus here uses he did not originate. The ex-

pressions were in a manner proverbial. Much depended upon the manner in which he spoke—his looks and tones. That he had no Jewish horror of foreigners is abundantly clear. At the very commencement of his ministry, he declared that many would come from the remotest corners of the earth, and sit down in the kingdom, while the children of the kingdom would be thrust out. That there was nothing forbidding in his manner at this time, we may infer from the fact that the woman was not intimidated. "True, Lord," she replied, "yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the master's table." The perseverance and humility of the woman, and her faith which no repulse could shake, impressed the mind of Jesus. He saw what spirit she was of—how great was her confidence, and he exclaimed, 'O woman, great is thy faith! Be it unto thee, even as thou wilt.' From that hour her daughter was relieved.

Of the precise nature of her daughter's disease we have no knowledge. She was suffering under one of those maladies which were attributed to the influence of evil spirits. It was then in all probability a mental disease. She had heard of the great wonder-worker, and shared in the feelings which the fame of him produced. She knew, we may suppose, that her mother had gone to obtain his aid. She must have been impressed, too, by the exciting rumour of his miracles and the force of her mother's extraordinary confidence in Jesus. Her cure, we may suppose, commenced with her mother's departure, and it was as justly attributed to the power of Jesus, as if he had been present and had used his miraculous authority. For by him, by his works which she had witnessed or heard of, the uncommon faith of the mother was produced. "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." The faith and will of the

woman, inspired by the miracles and the assurance of Jesus, and authoritatively expressed in her looks and tones, wrought upon her daughter, already convalescent, and completed her cure. We can form no adequate idea of the strength of that conviction which filled the mother's bosom. We know only that it must have given that air of authority which perfect confidence always wears. On common occasions, he who speaks and acts from a powerful personal conviction, always commands and overawes those about him. There was much in the relation of mother and daughter to cause the one to yield to the other implicit deference. So far as her child was concerned, the faith of this woman in the power of Jesus was only less strong than that of Jesus himself. His faith had been in a manner communicated to her.

IV. THE WITHERED HAND.

On a certain Sabbath, Jesus entered one of the synagogues. There was a man there one of whose hands was withered. Certain teachers of the law were also present, who watched Jesus with an evil eye. They were eager to see whether he would violate the sanctity of the day by healing the man. He perceived their design, and, after bidding the man to stand forth, he turned to those evil-disposed persons, and put to them this searching question, "Is it lawful to do well or to do ill on the Sabbath—to save life or to kill?" They were silent, for they knew that they were seeking to kill. And when he had surveyed them with a look of indignation, he turned to the man and said, "Stretch forth thine hand." And he stretched it out and it was made whole as the other. To perceive how powerfully the mind of this man must have been

wrought upon, we must consider the place where the miracle occurred. It was a place of worship. Let the reader think how he himself would feel to be called out in a church, and bidden to stand forth conspicuously in the midst of a gazing, breathless, crowded assembly, and before such an one as the Man of Nazareth? Would not his limbs tremble under him and his cheek turn pale with emotion? The man with a withered hand knew not precisely what would be done. He saw the enemies of Jesus quailing beneath that indignant eye, and the whole crowd excited with curiosity and awe. When we think with what power the individual mind is moved by an excited state of the general mind—how it is borne along by the resistless tide of public feeling, to account for the effect produced on him, it seems scarcely necessary to suppose that he, whose hand was restored, had any distinct idea of the true greatness of Him whose commanding voice he instantly obeyed. Awed by his presence, by his authoritative look and tone, gazing at him with that reverence, which must have been deepened beyond description, reflected back as it was from the countenances of that excited assembly, he could not but obey the awful bidding of Jesus. His mind, powerfully stimulated by these circumstances, was aroused to an extraordinary effort, and it acted upon the diseased member, and he recovered its instant use.

Now had this individual been suddenly thrown into a situation of imminent personal danger, we can easily conceive how he might have been wrought upon to forget that his limb was withered, and to exert a volition powerful enough to have acted upon the diseased nerves and muscles. His will would have been inspired by a sense of bodily danger, by the love of life, one of the lower principles of our nature. But as the case

actually was, far deeper springs of life were reached. The Man of Nazareth appealed to that feeling of veneration which is the root of religion, and which may be so awakened as to urge men to demonstrations of life and power, in comparison with which all that may be achieved through the instinct of self-preservation is poor and weak.

Were we only aware of the untold mass of vital force there is in the human mind, and of the influence possessed over it by our various instincts and sentiments, the sentiment of veneration especially, so far from having our credulity tasked by the miracles of Jesus, we should rather wonder that more and mightier miracles were not wrought ; and could account for the fact that more imposing wonders were not presented by him, only by observing in him the same feature of divinity that meets us in the world of Nature. Vast and various as are the displays of power that we witness in nature, perhaps we feel nothing more deeply than that it does not exhaust itself—that it is not more awful for what it does than for what it forbears to do.

V. THE DEMONIAK OF GADARA.

As Jesus was entering the country of the Gadarenes, “there met him out of the city a certain man, who had devils a long time and wore no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, Son of God most High? I beseech thee torment me not. (For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him; and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into

the wilderness.) And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him. And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep. And there was there a herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them; and he suffered them. Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake and were choked. When they that fed them, saw what was done, they fled, and went and told it in the city and the country. Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid." Luke viii. 27—35.

I am not able to give an account of this miracle, which will be perfectly satisfactory. I wish however to remark upon it, because, so far as I am capable of seeing into it, I find it singularly corroborative of the views I am to unfold.

I take it for granted that the cases of demoniacal possession mentioned in the New Testament, were simply instances of those disorders, bodily or mental, which, being sudden, and violent, and produced by no obvious cause, were attributed, according to the general belief of the times, to the influence of evil spirits. In comparison with the great truths which engrossed the attention and filled the heart of Jesus, the correctness of this popular belief was a matter of very little moment, to the consideration of which, it is not necessary to suppose that he had ever given a thought. His aim was to vindicate the power of truth, the authority of God, and this was fundamental to the establishment of

all truth, the destruction of all errors. Devoted to this high object, he had no time for curious and comparatively trifling inquiries about the origin of diseases. Accordingly he fell in with the popular language of the time, and probably had no personal convictions one way or the other, in regard to demoniacal possession. This he knew and this alone he cared to make clear, that over all the powers of nature, whether persons or principles, the Infinite Spirit, whose work and will he came to do, is supreme.

I suppose that the insanity of the Gadarene had been produced, or at least, very much aggravated, by a fearful mental impression; the idea that he was under the control of evil spirits. In all periods, popular superstitions have had a large share in producing or confirming mental derangement. The belief of those days in the influence of malignant spirits, must have had fearful effects upon excitable temperaments. The very circumstance that the Gadarene believed there was a *Legion* of demons in him, shows how strong was his impression that he was possessed. Here then in this fatal idea was the seat of his malady. And it was so deeply rooted that it could be corrected only by means adapted to the nature of the case.

As soon as he saw Jesus, whose fame had every where preceded him, he runs and throws himself down before him, and addresses him as the Messiah, giving expression as was natural, without the slightest hesitation, to an idea which was springing in all minds, and speaking in the character of the evil spirits, by whom he believed himself to be possessed. Jesus rebuked the spirits, and commanded them to come out of the man. But notwithstanding the command, the man still continued insane. How is this fact to be reconciled with the idea that the miraculous power of Jesus was a power which violated natural laws, and

had no regard to conditions? He commanded but was not obeyed! The fact was that the idea of his being possessed was so fixed, that, although the power of Jesus awed him into comparative quietness, still the false conviction of his mind could be destroyed only in a certain way, and by peculiar means. Jesus, seeing that he still continued insane or possessed, asked his name, in order to ascertain the state of the case. The maniac replied that his name was Legion; and he instantly begs that the evil spirits may be sent into the swine feeding at a distance. And here it has not been sufficiently considered that this proposal was not the suggestion of Jesus, but of the madman. It was the proposal of insanity, and is characterised by the cunning of insanity. While the unhappy man took care to speak in the character of the unclean spirits by whom he fancied himself possessed, and who he thought, might well be disposed to enter those unclean animals, it would seem as if he were actuated by a secret desire to have decisive evidence, ocular proof that they had really quitted him. He therefore proposes that they should be sent into the swine. It was an insane thought, but the result was fitted to act upon a diseased mind, and the authority of Jesus, sanctioning this proposal, was likely to satisfy the man that the evil spirits had gone from him. How the swine were affected, I know not, nor is it necessary to suppose that Jesus knew what the result would be, or to hold him answerable for it. If, as it appears, the relief of the man's mind depended upon his proposal's being acceded to, the value of the swine was not for a moment to be weighed against the welfare of a human being, and the safety of the whole neighbourhood, endangered by the ferocity of the maniac. No man could pass that way, he was so violent.

I do not attempt a complete solution of the case. I only repeat that, so far as it admits of explanation, it appears to warrant in a remarkable manner, the views here presented of the miraculous power of Jesus. Here, so far as the demoniac was concerned, this power was exerted not in violation, but in singular observance, of the laws of the mind.

There are no other cases of demoniacal possession mentioned in the Gospels, upon which it is necessary to remark particularly. The individuals thus afflicted, had, in the majority of cases, caught from what they had seen or heard, so exalted an idea of Jesus, that they hesitated not to address him outright as the Son of God. Thus regarding him, they were fully prepared to confess his authority and do his bidding. His whole appearance, conjoined with the powerful sensation every where produced by him, was fitted to act with no ordinary force upon diseased minds, and inspire them with confidence and self-possession. I have already briefly alluded to the lunatic child, brought first to the disciples of Jesus, who were unable to cure him. They inquired of their master, after he had cured the child, why they could not do it. His answer was, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting," i. e. 'You must have a degree of confidence, unattainable save by the strictest self-discipline.' The child was afflicted with violent fits, which so appalled the lookers on, and intimidated the disciples, that they lost the commanding authority of faith.

Jesus sent abroad seventy persons to announce the coming of the heavenly kingdom. This large company must have aided powerfully in spreading his fame and deepening the feeling which was every where excited. They return after a while, and tell him that they had brought evil spirits into subjection through his

name. His name—we can hardly conceive of the power with which the utterance of that name must have been attended in the raised state of the public mind. Naturally enough did it strike awe and submission into minds weakened by nervous derangement. It was not then a dead, familiar, sound as it is now, but the startling symbol of a new and unwonted power that was then present on the earth, acting through the eye and hand and voice of a living man.

VI. THE BLIND MEN.

There is particular mention made in the gospels of five or six blind men restored to sight by the touch of Jesus.

“Believe ye that I am able to do this?” said he to the two blind men, of whom we read in Matthew, ix. 27—31. “Yea, Lord,” is their reply. “Then, touched he their eyes, saying, “According to your faith, be it unto you.”

It is worthy of note, while those, who were suffering under nervous diseases, which left their senses unimpaired, were sometimes cured by Jesus without any personal connexion between him and them, that, in the case of those, whose sight or hearing was affected, he had recourse to very peculiar means—to personal contact, touching their eyes, the suffering organs, or anointing them with his saliva, and putting his fingers into the ears of the deaf. Those sufferers, who were in full possession of their senses, had the means of seeing and knowing all that was done by Jesus, all that was said and thought of him. In their case there was no obstruction to prevent the tide of sympathy and faith, which was flowing through all hearts, from rush-

ing in upon them, and lifting their minds to the elevation of the universal feeling. Whereas those who were deprived of sight were cut off from all those kindling influences which came through the eye. They could not look upon Jesus and catch life from the glorious vision. One avenue to their minds being closed, direct and peculiar means were naturally more requisite than in other cases. Some of the blind who came to Jesus possessed great faith in him, and little was required, beyond a simple touch, to make the communication between his mind and theirs, his faith and theirs, complete. But in the case of the man born blind, Jesus had recourse to special means. He spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle, and anointed the eyes of the blind man, and bade him go and wash in the pool of Siloam. In another instance, a similar anointing had at first only a partial effect, and Jesus repeated it. And in the case of the deaf man with an impediment in his speech, he touched the man's tongue with spittle, and put his fingers into his ears. These methods he used simply as signs, as a sort of language to convey his meaning, to express his faith to the sufferers, and cause his will to act upon theirs. I proceed to remark at length upon one instance of a blind man restored to sight, by Jesus.

Having journeyed about over Galilee, he is now approaching Jerusalem, attended by a crowd, increasing at every step of his progress, and their hearts beat high with wonder and hope. The throng draws near to Jericho, a city, a few miles distant from the capital. There is seated by the wayside a poor blind man. As his name is mentioned, we may suppose that he was generally known; that he had occupied the same spot for years. Hither had he crept, here to appeal in silent

misery to the charity of the passers-by. Little dreamed he that this was to be the last day of his wretchedness. He had heard, no doubt, much of the wonderful Man. The loss of sight, affecting his mind deeply, prepared him to give ready credit to the strange things that were told. Fondly had he prayed that the prophet would only come that way, that he might supplicate his aid. This was his cherished dream. But alas! he was poor and friendless, and who would care to lead a beggar to the great wonder-worker! But now the ears of the blind man catch the sound of innumerable feet, and he asks what it means. He is told that Jesus of Nazareth is going by; and instantly he shouts, "Son of David! have pity on me!" The people, as they pass, in no gentle language we may suppose, bid him hold his tongue. The impudent beggar! to imagine that the prophet would take any notice of him, of him, whose blindness, they thought, perhaps, in conformity with a common sentiment, was the well-merited punishment of his sins! Some, perhaps, were offended at the boldness with which he addressed Jesus by a title consecrated to the Messiah. They bid him be still. He heeds them not. He only utters so much the more the piercing cry, "Son of David! Son of David! have pity on me!" His voice reaches the ears of Jesus, and he pauses and directs the blind man to be brought to him. The murmur of an admiring multitude could not deafen him to the cry of the miserable. Conceive, if you are able, how the whole frame of that wretched creature must have quaked through every fibre, when the desire of Jesus was signified to him, and he felt the many eager hands that were extended to lay hold of him, and lead him into that awful presence. He threw off his garment, rose, and came to Jesus. Some MSS. read, "he, casting away his garment, *leaped* and came

to Jesus.”* The crowd gives way—he stands before the Man of Nazareth. That voice, modulated to a tone of more than regal authority, sounds in his ears, “What would you that I should do for you?” “I would receive my sight,” is the reply. We, who have eyes and see, can form no adequate idea of the depth of emotion with which this request was preferred. We have no knowledge from any personal experience of such a state of mind as is here expressed, and consequently we cannot presume to estimate the influence which such a mental state must have on the body. Here is one human being, standing before another, and asking him for his sight, with undoubting faith that he, of whom he makes the request, is perfectly able to grant it! For years he had asked of others nothing more than a pittance of money or of food, doubting whether he would be heeded. But of Jesus, with unhesitating confidence, he asked his sight! Is not a most singular state of mind here disclosed? Taking my ground upon the mighty and undeniable influence of the mind on the body, I ask also, whether we may venture to deny, or to measure the mysterious power which a mental impression like this, must have over the physical frame, over all its functions and infirmities? Are we not prepared to perceive the full meaning of the words of Jesus, when he says to the blind man, “Receive thy sight. Thy faith hath delivered thee from blindness.” Can we not see with what electric

* We may wonder why circumstances, so slight apparently, should have been so minutely recorded. But the instant we enter into the mind of the blind man, the reason of this minuteness is disclosed. In the intensity of his emotion, he flung away his garment, and he, who had so long sat there, feeble and wretched, seemed as if he would have flown. These particulars, at first sight scarcely worth mentioning, naturally arrested attention at the time, as the effects of the powerful feeling that prompted them. The more we strive to appreciate the excitement which the appearance of our Saviour produced, the more will the amazing naturalness of the History open upon us.

power these few words, connected with the thrilling touch of Jesus, must have wrought on the blind man, giving the last quickening impulse to his faith, so that the power of vision which exists, be it remembered, not in the eye, which is only its organ, but in the mind, was suddenly put forth, and those sightless orbs were restored to soundness.

More than two-thirds of the miracles, particularly related in the gospels, admit of being viewed in a manner similar to the foregoing. In a majority of cases there existed a very peculiar mental condition, the fullest belief in the power of Jesus of Nazareth. This faith, as it dwelt in him and in the people about him, in the subjects of his miracles particularly, was the principal and most powerful of the means whereby these extraordinary effects were produced. It cannot be urged that this means never before nor since produced like effects. Because the means was new and singular. Never before nor since has precisely such a mental condition existed, so vital a faith, not that it was new in nature and kind, but simply in degree. Will it be said that the faith itself involves an interruption of the natural order of things, a violation of natural laws? And is it not a first principle of human nature to believe? Is not faith a natural product? But although the faith that existed in the times of Jesus, and by means of which such remarkable effects were produced, was natural enough, it may be said that the object of this faith, Jesus Christ, was a miracle, in the popular sense of the word—that the existence of such a being, possessing power so extraordinary, implied a suspension of the common laws of nature, that the introduction of a man so endowed beyond all other men, into the world was a violation of the natural order of things.

By inquiring how the minds of sufferers and others came to be inspired with that perfect confidence in Jesus, we shall see whether there be any reason for regarding his existence as a miracle in any sense except that in which all things are miracles.

There are two circumstances which bore with great force upon the minds of those who were labouring under severe bodily infirmities. 1. The pressure of long and heavy suffering. This strongly inclined them to believe in any fair prospect of relief, especially in a man of whom such things were related as were told of Jesus. 2. The authority of public opinion, the force of the public mind, deeply moved by the appearance and bearing of Jesus. Every where he awakened wonder and awe. Crowds were collected wherever he came; and there was a wide conviction that he was no ordinary man. Every individual looked upon him through the magnifying medium of the public feeling, and was thus wrought upon mightily. These two things must be kept steadily in view.

Still the question remains, How was this confidence in the power of Jesus produced in the first instance? How came it to be believed that he could heal the sick and relieve the suffering at will?

He was believed by others to possess the power of working wonders, because he believed it himself, and showed that he believed it, and that he believed nothing that was not true. His faith it was, that produced a like faith. So that every effect produced by the faith of others, was, in reality, produced by him. I do not say that he fancied himself to be able to heal the sick and raise the dead, but that he knew it. There was no delusion in him, but faith, calm consistent, genuine faith, which may be termed knowledge.

That he possessed this knowledge appears by signs

the most satisfactory. If he did not know—if he only fancied himself, to be endowed with new and unprecedented powers, he was under a monstrous delusion, and it is altogether incredible that he should have cherished so gross an error, without betraying it in his whole conduct and manner, by word and work. But he has exhibited not a shadow of evidence that he was deluded. On the contrary, every thing he did and said is singularly characteristic of a true and healthy condition of the inward life. If we cannot discern in him a true mind, by which I mean not merely an honest mind, but a mind, all whose convictions were founded in reality, then are we at a loss to distinguish truth from falsehood, right from wrong, light from darkness. No, he was not self-deceived. There is not a trace in him of self-deception. Never man gave such triumphant proof as he, that he believed only what was true. There is no mark of well-grounded conviction which is not legible in him, and particularly in his bearing as a wonder-worker. Nay, he has given us a revelation of a true mind, a perfect model, whereby to test the presence of genuine conviction in other men; and let us enter fully into his spirit, and we need never more be imposed upon.

I care little comparatively for the grounds upon which this faith of his in himself was based. That it was faith, in the perfect sense of the word, and no delusion, its whole manifestation satisfies me. I know it by his own simple rule, by its fruits. You may gather grapes of thorns, and figs from thistles, but tell me not that the Life portrayed in the gospels, and the divine mind there revealed were the life and the mind of one so egregiously deluded as to believe that he could heal the sick, give sight to the blind, still the tempest and raise the dead at a word, when, in reality, he had no such power.

It is held to be a settled principle that an individual does not prove a thing to be true, merely by proving that he believes it himself. But it is a principle demanding important qualification. A true faith is distinguishable from a false one. Let us see that a man's convictions are in harmony with his own nature and with all nature, that so far from introducing discord into his life, they beautify it, and reveal its unity, we feel that they are genuine convictions, not false but true. The grounds on which they repose may be hidden from us. We may not see the root. But if the fruits are fair to the eye and pleasant to the taste, and full of healing for the sick, and of life for the dying, we know, by the best evidence, that there is a root, nourished by the river of God; and seed from the heaven-sown tree falls into our hearts, and a like faith germinates there also. We cannot desire—we cannot imagine more satisfactory evidence than Jesus of Nazareth has given of his faith in his singular powers, and of the genuineness of that faith, not merely its sincerity but its truth.

Still, but not because it is necessary to the confirmation of our faith in him, we may be desirous to discover the grounds upon which he cherished this singular conviction.

The character of the conviction itself proves, as I have said, that it was based upon reality. He believed in his own power, because he was actually endowed with this power. It was in him, not acquired by education, not from circumstances, not from flesh and blood, but given him by the Father of Spirits. He who sent him into the world upon a high mission, endowed him with the qualifications requisite to its fulfilment. As he was born to bear witness to the truth, he was born also with that original and wonderful nature of which

his life was the authentic manifestation. And his knowledge of himself, his faith in his own God-given power, was a matter of consciousness, a consciousness, which, we believe, existed from his earliest childhood, and which grew deeper and deeper through the daily ministrations of the Divine Spirit, until it was made full and complete at his baptism.

He stands alone and unapproached. We know of no being that has appeared before or since, with whom we can compare him, without doing violence to the reverence he commands. The existence of such a being does not, however, imply a suspension of the common laws of nature. If the peculiarity of his gifts appears to be at variance with the order of nature, it is also in harmony with the variety which is a feature of nature fully as conspicuous. And what is still more important to observe, the whole action of his singular gifts outward and inward breathes the genius and style of nature. The same spirit that pervades the material and moral worlds, and ordains the offices of the elements of both, clothing the meanest things with grandeur and the greatest with simplicity, illustrates the original works of Jesus.

Let those who find it difficult, without assuming a violation of nature's laws, to believe in the existence of such a being, consider the argument of Paul, when, in reply to those who pronounced it impossible that the dead should live again, he appeals to the endless diversity of the glories of creation, and virtually demands, who, amidst these varied displays of power, can question the possibility of the restoration of the dead in such bodies as it may please the Almighty to give them. Cast a glance upon mankind. There is a universal resemblance, yet no two of the myriads are alike. How infinitely various the endowments of indi-

viduals! In every department of life, there are some who are greatly distinguished, possessing powers, underrived from education, powers, which act with unconscious ease and unerring rapidity. To these we attribute *genius*, a term very vaguely defined in the general apprehension, but still, so far as defined, synonymous with inspiration. It signifies a power which comes through no human influence, but must be accounted the free gift of God. When we see a little child, not otherwise remarkable, penetrating at a glance the mysteries of numbers, leaping with the quickness of lightning at conclusions, which mature and educated minds reach only by a long and laborious process, and doing it with the same simplicity and unconsciousness that mark his ordinary movements, what, pray, do we behold but the manifest power of God? Or, when the poet, rending the veil of custom that shrouds all things to the common eye, and pouring in the light of his own spirit, opens worlds of beauty in the lowliest places, creates new forms of loveliness, and reveals ties binding us to all created things, holier and closer than the ties of blood, do we use a metaphor, or rather do we not state a fact, when we pronounce him inspired? His *muse*, if a fabulous being, represents a greater being and more divine. He has a native, original power of *seeing*, not the product of human circumstances but the gift of Heaven, distinguishing him from all other men. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars. But the visible splendours of the universe differ not more widely than man does from man. Who shall presume to tell what gifts men may not receive from the bountiful Father of Spirits—what new men God may not create! How know we but, at this very moment, there may be entering into life in some obscure Nazareth, a child,

whose star no wise men have discovered, who brings with him a glorified nature, fashioned by the ever-brooding Spirit, filled with a new measure of life, and destined to breathe a new soul of faith into a heartless and sensual world!

Thus by nature Jesus Christ was distinguished from all men. It was given him to see into his own wonderful being and into the soul of man. He discovered the miraculous spark of divinity glowing amidst the embers of the weakest and most degraded mind. In all men he saw a mass of force of which they were scarcely conscious; and seeing, believing, he acted according to this faith, and as he expressed his faith by a word or by his touch, the fountains of the great deep of mind were broken up, and all men were stirred, and the world witnessed new demonstrations of the power of God. By a true and perfect faith, he created faith. He commanded confidence; he inspired others with a faith, like his own, in his power, and every instance of the exercise of this power contributed to deepen and diffuse the conviction that God was with him and in him, as he never was before in the flesh.

That he was not the victim of a heated mind, he has shown, as I have said, by unquestionable signs. There were no vehement assertions of authority. There was no hurry, and no hesitation, no self-exaggeration, no impatience to produce conviction. Whether men believed him or not, he cared not for his own sake; but for theirs, he was ready to die that they might believe. Not only is every symptom of a deluded mind wanting, never before nor since has the world witnessed so complete a manifestation of a mind, true in all its persuasions. There was the deepest feeling with an unaffected dignity, the consciousness explicitly avowed of

a more than imperial office, with a simple, natural interest in humanity in its meanest forms. In all circumstances, through all opposition and trial, and suffering, his spirit was attuned to a perfect harmony with truth and nature, and every heart not utterly lost, awoke and responded thereto. Alas for us! we have not yet entered into the sanctuary of his spirit, or we should better understand his power. We lie, like the poor cripple at the beautiful gate of the Temple. Still, could one be found now to adjure us with the look and tone and faith of an Apostle, by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, to rise up and walk, miracles might again be wrought by that name on the spirits and on the bodies of men.

It will be observed that our attention thus far has been confined to those miracles, of which the sick, the blind, the infirm in body or mind, were the subjects. In these cases, under the warrant of our Saviour's own declarations, and by the analogy of nature, we can trace the power which wrought the cures, operating through the faith of the diseased. Thus viewed, these miracles are of a piece with nature; and this harmony is their decisive claims to be received as facts.

But Jesus wrought miracles not only on the bodies of the living, but also on inanimate matter and on the dead. With five loaves and two small fishes he fed thousands. He hushed the winds and waves at a word. He called Lazarus from the grave, where he had lain four days. Where are the signatures of nature in these miracles? And what had faith to do here?

With reference to this class of miracles, I remark in the first place, that, so far as his manner is concerned, there are none of his wonderful works more im-

pressively marked with the spirit of nature than these. By nothing that appears in him on these occasions, is there given the least ground to suppose that he was doing any but the most natural things in the world. On the contrary, the presumption is strong that these acts, unprecedented as they were, were *natural* acts.

VII. THE MULTIPLICATION OF THE LOAVES.

When Jesus fed the thousands, he was moved by a simple impulse of humanity. "I have compassion," said he, "on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat, and if I send them away fasting to their homes, they will faint by the way." Some had come from a great distance. He inquires of his disciples what means there were of supplying the wants of the people. They produce the merest pittance. He bids them arrange the multitude with some degree of order. And then, when that small quantity of food is laid before him, and just as it is about to increase so marvellously under his hands, is there a trace of self-consciousness visible? Does it appear that he sought to draw attention to what he was about to do, as if it were something singular? Not a shadow of any feeling of this sort is visible. In accordance with a familiar custom, he lifts up his voice in acknowledgment of the bounty of Heaven. There is no reason to suppose that he used any unusual form of thanksgiving. And what does he do? Does he cause a table to rise and spread itself out, covered with the variety becoming such an entertainment as the interposing hand of God might be expected to provide? Oh, no! The miracle is the plainest, the least imposing possible. The simple food before him, this alone he multiplies. And when the people have all

eaten and are satisfied, mark that direction given to his disciples, "Gather up the fragments, so that nothing be lost." Every where in nature we behold profusion but no waste. Was the mind of Jesus ever more true to nature than as here expressed? To refresh the fainting multitude, he exercised an unheard-of power, but without the shadow of display, without a single trace of appearing to do any thing strange. His purpose answered, his frugality is as conspicuous and simple as his kindness. Observe too, that it was not to collect people around him that he wrought this miracle. He wished to dismiss them. He was anxious to be alone. When they had eaten he sent them away.

The contrast between him and the people was never more striking than on this occasion. The whole country was in a flame. The multitude, whom he fed, he had sought from very fatigue to avoid. They followed him into the desert, or rather preceded him to the spot, whither he went, with his few personal friends, for the sake of repose. There had been, as Mark relates, such crowds "coming and going" that Jesus and his disciples "had not leisure so much as to eat." He had endeavoured to retire privately. But he could not be hid. His intention was discovered, his person recognised, and the rumour of his going ran like wildfire, and immediately cities and villages, far and near, poured forth their population, so that when he reached the shore, thousands were waiting to meet him. Affected at the sight, for they seemed to him like sheep without a shepherd, he resumed his labours. Yet he caught no excitement from the multitude. How great the excitement was may be inferred from the fact that they remained with him three days,* finding their

* One whole day, probably, and part of the day preceding and the day following.

sustenance in his words and works, which so interested them that they cared little for what they ate or drank. But his manner was marked throughout, as we have seen, with the quietness of nature.

Now I say again that without going any further, the *manner* of Jesus on this occasion, so perfectly natural, warrants the belief that the exercise of his power, however novel and mysterious, was still in perfect accordance with nature's laws, and that we should see that it was so, were our knowledge of nature enlarged. To those who ask, what possible influence could faith have in multiplying the loaves and fishes, I reply, firstly, that Jesus himself, whenever he spake of the power of faith, always illustrated it by reference to its influence on inanimate matter. "If," said he once and again, "ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye may say to this mountain or to this sycamine tree, be thou plucked up by the roots and cast into the sea, and it would obey you." So efficacious was faith in his view, that where it existed in the smallest degree, as a grain of mustard seed, he declared that trees might be uprooted and mountains overturned at a word.

That the instantaneous multiplication of the loaves was within the compass of that Power, in which we live and move and have our being, is undeniable. All I contend for is, that this extraordinary effect was wrought by the Supreme Cause working through, and by means of, the faith and will of Jesus, according to laws and relations of matter and mind, pre-established, existing in the nature of things, although as yet partially or wholly hid from human ken. Who will affirm that the relations of matter and spirit are defined? According to the best philosophers, "all that we know of the impenetrability of matter amounts to this, that there exist certain repulsive forces, which coun-

teract those compressing forces we ourselves exert. Now, if this is the case, we must ascribe those forces to something analogous to that of which we are conscious in ourselves. In other words, we must ascribe them to the agency of mind; for active force is an attribute of mind, just as much as sensation or thought.”* What we call matter, then, is a mode of mind. And the power of Jesus over inanimate substances was the action of mind upon mind. There was an affinity, therefore, between the cause and the effect. His power was peculiar and unprecedented, but it neither was impossible, nor did it involve a violation of the order of nature. If the proportion now existing in point of numbers, between those who hear and speak on the one hand, and the *deaf and dumb* on the other, were reversed—nay, were there only two or three individuals of our race who possessed the gifts of hearing and speech, should we be justified in questioning their existence, or in assigning them to a preternatural order of beings? Yet we should perceive that they had methods of acting upon one another of which we could form no conception. We know not what a host of undeveloped faculties exists in the meanest of men.

VIII. THE STILLING OF THE WAVES.

Jesus hushed the winds and waves by a word. “Peace! Be still!” said he, and there was a great calm. The calm was produced by the utterance of these words, and followed as a natural consequence. How these sounds wrought upon the storm I know not; neither do I know how sound acts on the mind and the body through the ear. The one is not less

* Boscovich, according to Stewart.

inscrutable than the other. Were we only aware of the mighty force of which the majestic form and commanding voice of the Man of Nazareth was the symbol, it would less surprise us,—it would seem more natural that the storm bowed to his powerful will than that our familiar utterances, dubious signs as they oftentimes are, should act upon the hearts and sway the movements of our fellow men. What else but an instantaneous repose of the elements should follow the bidding of so godlike a spirit! It could not but be so.

IX. THE WALKING ON THE WATER.

That Jesus should have walked on the top of the waves without sinking, appears to be a direct violation of the laws of gravitation. But the details of the fact tend powerfully to confirm the idea that faith was an important, necessary agent here. When Peter saw that it was Jesus who was approaching the vessel, he called to him, "Bid me come to thee, on the water." Jesus bade him, and he left the vessel, but soon became frightened, and began to sink. Jesus caught hold of him, and said, "Wherefore didst thou doubt? O thou of little faith!" Now, however this incident may be understood, whether as violating nature or harmonising with it, I am unable to question its reality because it is so interwoven with a natural and characteristic representation of Peter. But the language of Jesus—his address to the Apostle, intimates strongly that it was by means of faith that his body was sustained upon the water's surface as securely as upon a marble floor. The cause in this case, as in all cases, was the power of God, and the indispensable means or instrument was confidence in that Power, which, let our faith in it be a genuine and true faith and no illu-

sion, will enable us to do all things. It is always here around and within us, with an infinity of resources.

X. THE RAISING OF THE DEAD.

Jesus raised the dead. Here again I begin with observing that never was his manner so thoroughly natural, never was it more impressively the manner of one doing natural acts, than upon the occasions on which he performed these great miracles.

These were things to test the character of Jesus to the core. Were the records of these events mere fabrications, or distorted statements of ordinary occurrences, what a shock would be given us by the contrast between fictions so gross and a character so surpassingly single and self-consistent! We hold them to be real facts, not only because, as we read, no discord grates upon our inward sense, but because they create a new feeling of moral truth and majesty, a new idea of the godlike.

Once as he drew near a certain city, attended by a large crowd, he met the funeral of a young man, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. He said unto her, "Weep not," and approached the bier, and they that bore it stopped, and he said, "Young man! I command thee! arise!" And he sat up, and Jesus delivered him to his mother. Nothing, by the way, but nature, nothing but truth, could have inspired an account so divinely simple. As I pause over the record, a sense of reality comes over me so vividly, that I have not the heart to utter a word. It seems like profanation. He that hath eyes to see, let him see that there was, not only no unmeaning preparation, no artifice to attract attention and stimulate curiosity, but the directest method and the calmest dignity. He

works the miracle, but not as if it were any thing surprising. He says not a word, he lifts not a finger to make the crowd gaze and wonder, and therefore they did wonder, and a fear came on all, and they exclaimed, "a great prophet hath arisen among us," and, "God is visiting his people."

In another case he makes no account whatever of the miracle as a miracle. I refer to the case of the little girl, the daughter of a ruler of the synagogue. He was told that she was dying, and his aid was solicited in her behalf. Before he reached the house, intelligence came that she was dead. He continued on his way, however, and when he arrived at the place, he found the professional mourners, whom it was the custom to employ, already assembled, and the house was filled with the sounds of lamentation. He instantly hushed the noise and dismissed the company, saying, "She is not dead, but sleepeth." Had he thought of displaying his power, he would have directed those around him to satisfy themselves by close inspection that she had breathed her last. He does nothing of this sort, but the whole proceeding, on his part, is marked with the simplicity and directness of a common act of kindness. Shutting out all but the parents, and one or two of his personal friends, without the least parade of preparation, he approached the bed and called to the little girl "Damsel! I command thee, arise!" and these few words, uttered with all the power of his perfect faith, penetrated the dull, cold ear of death, which all the noise of the mourners could not startle, and he took her by the hand, and she arose, and he commanded them to give her nourishment. Could any thing have been done, so far as the manner of doing it was concerned, more naturally? He charged those present to tell no man what had happened. It

seems as if he would have hidden from his left hand what his right hand was doing, even when it was doing so mighty a work. Observe him closely on this occasion. His whole mode of proceeding is as if he were discharging the simplest office of humanity. His singularity as a wonder-worker is the absence of every thing peculiar and formal, the perfect simplicity of his deportment. In fine, so far as I am able to discern upon the closest inspection, he wrought miracles, not as if there was any thing special in them, but just as he did every thing else. It would seem as if he could not have conceived how it could be otherwise than that he should be obeyed. Beyond all question the power of performing these wonders was native to him, and its exercise was as easy and natural in him as that of our commonest faculties is in us.

The only other instance of restoration from the grave is that of Lazarus. The account of this event is marked throughout with inimitable touches of nature. When the stone had been rolled from the sepulchre at the bidding of Jesus, he lifted up his eyes to Heaven, and said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me, and I know that thou hearest me always; nevertheless, because of the people who stand by I have said it that they may believe." And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, "'Lazarus! come forth!' And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes and with a cloth about his face. And Jesus said, 'Loose him, and set him free.'"

But although the manner of Jesus on these occasions confirms the impression that the effects he produced, extraordinary as they are, are in entire harmony with nature, it will still be asked, what had faith to do here?

I consider it a remarkable circumstance that, of the three individuals whom Jesus restored to life, one was

a personal friend of his, and the two others were young persons, one a little girl twelve years of age, and the other a young man.

A connexion which, I cannot persuade myself, is fanciful, discloses itself between cases of this description, and certain remarkable declarations of Jesus.

"Whoso *believeth* in me," said he just before he called Lazarus from the tomb, "though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whoso liveth and believeth in me shall never die." It is true these are, in form, general propositions. But when I think upon what occasion, under what circumstances they were uttered, they seem to possess a particular and pointed significance. There was the dead Lazarus, a dead believer, the thought of whom was present to all hearts as Jesus spoke; and it is as if he said to Martha, "your dead brother believed in me, and through his faith in me he will come to life; and to you, who are now living, if you believe in me, death will cease to be death. You will see that what is called death is but a mode of life." Lazarus had entered the dark valley with an affection for Jesus which death could not destroy, with a faith in him which was likewise indestructible. His spirit had sunk into the mysterious slumber of the grave, cherishing a principle of faith over which, as the life of the soul, no physical change could have any power. He had gone from the present state bound to Jesus by a tie which no distance of space could sunder, which stretched across the dark gulf. The connexion between the body and the soul is alike inscrutable in life and in death. Where the spirit is in life we know not. We are 'obscurely sensible' of its immediate presence in the brain or the heart. Neither know we where it is in death. The general impression is that the union of the two is severed with the last heaving of the lungs.

But we know not that it is so. When the spirit ceases to manifest itself outwardly we hastily conclude that it has changed its place. Let us be on our guard against the illusions which the idea of space practises on us. How know we but that "the lost friend is still here mysteriously, even as we are here mysteriously with God?" How know we but that, for a time longer or shorter after the last breath, the mind possesses the faculty of acting upon and reanimating the body, a faculty, which a mighty spiritual force, like that of which the voice of Jesus was the symbol, may prompt it to exert and so cause its resumption of the body. Such a connexion existed between the inmost spirit of Jesus and the inmost spirit of Lazarus, before the death of the latter, that no man can venture to deny that this intimate fellowship may have been the means by which the mighty Living wrought upon the believing dead. And till it is proved that no such connexion existed, or, if it did exist, that it was not adequate to so great an effect as the raising of Lazarus, it is unphilosophical to suppose the agency, in this instance, of any more unusual and extraordinary cause. The dying have been revived for a little while by the agonising appeal of a beloved voice, and bright intelligence has flickered once more in the glazed eye. No human mind can fathom the power of which that awful summons, "Lazarus! come forth!" was the symbol. Let the reader consider that these are not the suggestions of an extravagant pretension to knowledge. Their force will be felt when we confess our ignorance, and extricate our minds from the hasty impressions concerning life and death, which we are apt to cherish as self-evident truths.

Let not the ground which I take be misunderstood. I am not opposing speculations to facts. For the facts,

and the facts as they are represented, I earnestly contend. Nay, it is the facts that I am principally anxious to establish. The question between these and the common views of the miracles, is simply a question between one theory of the facts and another. If it be said that the thoughts, suggested above concerning the connexion between the body and soul, and life and death, are mere assumptions, I ask in reply whether it be not equally an assumption to assert that the spirit of Lazarus had passed irrevocably out of the reach of the will and the voice of Jesus. In the absence of direct evidence, my assumptions, I conceive, are as fully warrantable as this last. If it be urged that no such event has ever occurred before or since, as the restoration of a man four days dead at the sound of a human voice, I ask again with no thought of evading the difficulty, has such a man as Jesus of Nazareth ever appeared. He was an original creation, a new and exalted Son of God, whose being not only harmonised with all the familiar laws of nature, but also revealed new laws, new modes of Divine Power, which we are capable of so far tracing as to perceive that they do not interrupt, but agree with all the ways of God in creation and in the soul of man, that they are indeed and in truth, divine natural laws, instances of Nature's work, not breaking in upon her unity but crowning her with new light, unfolding her perfect order.

But to return. There is one circumstance mentioned in the account of the raising of Lazarus, which requires particular remark. Before he wrought the miracle he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and thanked God for having heard him. On no other occasion of performing a miracle did he utter himself in the same way. For what was he so grateful? Not, certainly,

for the bare opportunity of raising a dead man to life. Opportunities of this sort he had already had. Lazarus was not the only individual who had died in the course of his ministry ; and had he merely desired an opportunity of restoring a dead man to life, it might easily have been obtained. Nor was it merely for the power of raising the dead, for this power he possessed already and had exerted once and again ; and besides, every thing leads us to believe that the miraculous power was natural to him, a part of his being. No, it was for neither of these things that the divine joy of his heart broke forth, as he lifted up those eyes, just before streaming with tears, and exclaimed, " Father ! I thank thee that thou hast heard me." He had prayed, we may believe, again and again, for opportunities to fulfil his work, to promote the blessed cause of truth and advance the divine glory. And now he felt that a great opportunity had occurred in the good providence of his Father, and he was grateful for it. A personal friend, one who had reposed perfect confidence in him, had died, between whom and himself had been formed the living tie of faith. He could now exert his wonderful power under its requisite conditions, without the slightest compromise of the dignity and greatness of his purpose. He had the opportunity of acting from pure and generous aims. There was room for a simple and true act of his will. And he saw that the effect could not but be great. On account of those who stood by, he thanked God for the opportunity now given him, not of displaying a physical wonder, but of exhibiting that power of faith which is the brightest token of the presence of God. Herein was the rare greatness of his character, that in the presence of the very multitudes whom he wished to influence, he could do such things as no man had ever done before, not only with-

out the slightest shadow of display, but with as perfect singleness of mind and simplicity of manner, as if there were not one human eye to see what he was doing.

The two others, whom he restored to life, were young persons; one was quite a child. Let it be remembered with what particular regard he treated the young. In comparison with all other teachers of antiquity nothing in him strikes me as more peculiar and original than the manner in which he spoke of the young. "Of such," said he, "is the kingdom of Heaven." There is more here than a mere figure of speech. Faith is the characteristic of childhood and youth. So congenial is it to a child's nature to cherish trust, to bestow confidence, so ready is he to listen to all sounds as to true voices, that, if we supposed he had come into this world from a pre-existent state, we should infer that he had lived in a world of perfect truth. "Heaven lies about us in our infancy." The mind of the young child appears to live and move and have its being, all unconsciously, in those truths, which the man is toiling almost hopelessly to find. They brood over it "like the day." And although the corrupting illusions of sense fast, very fast, close us round, and the heavy yoke of custom bows us down, and we daily travel further from the east, yet something of the child's heart stays with us to the end, amidst the thickening clouds of pride and sin.

"O joy! that in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive!"

Had the deep, articulate, meaning of the immortal Ode from which I quote, reached our inner sense, were it

something more to us than the faint music of a distant angel, we should be prepared to receive the full significance of the hallowed words of Jesus.

In childhood too, it is natural to suppose, the body is peculiarly open and plastic to the agency of the indwelling spirit. It is not then hardened by sensual habits. Body and mind are then fresh and ductile, and the human being is "an incorporated will."

Between Jesus and children there was a peculiar sympathy. He took them in his arms and blessed them, for he saw in them the representatives of pure spirits. He placed a child before his disciples as their model. In declaring, as he did with so much solemnity, that the guardian angels of children are of the highest order, of those who stand nearest the Eternal Throne, he intimated that God is very near to the young. It was because he felt himself bound by spiritual, living ties to little children, that he said of the little girl, who had just stepped across the dark threshold, "She is not dead, but sleepeth." To him her spirit was, visibly as it were, within call of his, and he had but to beckon and she would return. It was so perfectly easy to summon her back, that she seemed to him not to be dead.

These remarks must suffice to disclose to those who are disposed to perceive it, the probable correspondence between the restoration to life of the girl and the young man, and the deepest laws of nature, the order of that spiritual world, to the developement of whose forces, faith is, in the nature of things, the essential condition. To such, I say, as are disposed to perceive it. Without this disposition, words, reasonings are vain. "Murmur not among yourselves," said Jesus, "no man can come to me except the Father who hath sent me draw him." God forbid that I should adduce these words in an arrogant spirit! Most deeply do I

feel that my own vision is dim, my own faith faint; and if he, who sees men only as trees walking, is disposed to boast of his sight, he only proves himself among the blindest.

To those who insist that Jesus referred his miracles to the power of God, I say in conclusion, that it has been the ruling purpose of these chapters, (imperfectly executed, I know,) to justify this reference, to show that his miracles were wrought by the spirit, that they bear the impress of the finger of Him, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things, and I am wholly unable to understand how this can be shown, save by showing that they are in entire harmony with his nature and with all nature.

There are three of the miracles, *the turning water into wine, the finding a piece of money in a fish's mouth, and the withering of the fig-tree*, of which I feel myself bound to confess that I am as yet unable to discern their truth, as I discern the truth of the rest. I do not say that I am disposed to question their reality, for I am unconscious of any such disposition. I am persuaded something has been overlooked or not yet discovered in the relations of these facts. There is light yet to break forth to disclose their life and beauty and harmony.

The question now arises, in what does the importance of the miracles consist? What is their value and use? I answer they are of inestimable value as Signs. And this is their designation in the Scriptures. The word 'miracle' occurs comparatively seldom. They are entitled by the sacred writers 'signs and wonders.' They are signs of the Spirit of Jesus and

the Spirit of God. These great acts were words. As 'his language was action, so was his action, language.'

All facts are valuable solely as signs, as they signify those truths and facts which are not objects of sense. All physical phenomena, the changes and appearances of the natural world as they are presented to our senses, are worthy of attention and study, because they unfold the laws and modes of the physical creation. So also the facts of human life, the words and deeds of men, are interesting and important only as they manifest the qualities of the human mind and heart, and let us into the spirit or nature of man and the laws of his being. Regarding all facts as a sort of language, full of significance, of no value to man until he has learned to interpret them, we may perceive that in this light, the facts of the life of Jesus are of supreme importance. In the long and various succession of events which pass before human eyes, they are the fullest of meaning. They are, so to speak, the key-words in the vast volume which lies open before us to read and learn. They are the signs, which, rightly interpreted, will give us the complete idea of a man, the most expressive illustration of the noblest of the divine creations, of a Son of God ; and, of course, as the Creator is known through his works, of the Spirit of God himself. In fine, such is the connexion between religion, philosophy and science, that the miracles of Jesus bear vital relations to the whole sum of thought and knowledge. To disregard them is to leave out of view the most valuable facts whereby we are to be aided in forming a sound philosophy of life, providence and nature ; and it is of unspeakable importance that they should be proved beyond the possibility of doubt. Their value is not limited to the

age in which they occurred. By no means. They were never more valuable than they are now at this present period, when the study of the profoundest philosophy is reviving with some new interest. The relations of philosophy and Christianity are reciprocal. But hitherto the latter has been interpreted in accordance with philosophical systems, in the origin of which it has had no participation. It must be studied by the new methods of philosophical investigation, for which it prepares the way by its noble proclamation of freedom, and which have obtained for us so many triumphs in the other and inferior departments, and then philosophy itself will receive from Christianity aids so new and powerful, that it will be a matter of astonishment how it has ever made any progress without them. Christianity must no longer be narrowed by philosophy, but philosophy be enlightened, enlarged and inspired by the religion of Jesus Christ.

But it is in their relation to him by whom they were wrought that their primary value lies. They are parts of his wondrous being. Without them, we can obtain only a very imperfect knowledge of what he was. He fades away into a shade. His words give us, it is true, some idea of him, but it is by his works that he is revealed, and we are enabled to distinguish him as an individual from all other men. It is by the nature, manner, form of his deeds, that we learn what he was. Were we striving to obtain a vivid idea of any distinguished individual, it would be a strange proceeding to put out of view, as unimportant, all the most remarkable acts of his life. So in the case of Jesus Christ. Erase the wonderful things he did from his history, and you throw away the indispensable means of knowing him. You may have a dim idea in

your mind to which you give his name. But you have formed no conception of him as he is, and he does not exist to you. In this way the rejection of the miracles is equivalent to a rejection of all that gives Christianity a peculiar value. For, in showing us what manner of man he was, what was his inward life, they attest his authority, his divine authority, and give a new weight to every word that he uttered.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRANSFIGURATION.

"The transfiguration of Christ is to be regarded rather as an event in the lives of the disciples who witnessed it, than as an event in the life of the Saviour himself. It was an effect produced on their minds, and not any thing which essentially affected his condition. He needed no such outward sign to assure him of that divine nature, to which his own consciousness bore unceasing testimony far stronger than any outward sign could supply."

F. H. HEDGE.

THE extraordinary facts to the establishment of which the two preceding chapters are devoted, being admitted, it follows that the spectators of these wonders, the personal attendants of Jesus particularly, must have been moved in no common manner and degree. Those great events must have excited their sensibilities powerfully. That a disposition was produced, more or less strong, in the disciples of Jesus, to look for things startling and supernatural, and to transform common occurrences into miracles, is a presumption enforced by all that we know of the human heart. Living in the midst of wonders, they naturally enough expected wonders.

It behoves us in examining these records of the life of Jesus, to keep in view the possible influence of this disposition for the marvellous, which there was so much to produce, and do our utmost to determine whether and to what extent it has given the narratives the fashion which they wear. It may be thought by some that this bias has had a preponderating share in making

the gospels what they are, and that all that is represented as supernatural in these books may be traced to the passion for the marvellous, excited and kept alive and active by something unusual in the circumstances, imposing in the appearance of Jesus. But the groundlessness of this suspicion, I have, I trust, exposed in the foregoing chapters. The miracles of Jesus exhibit marks of no such parentage. On the contrary they present, in their whole shape and spirit, most expressive features of resemblance to him, whose acts they are declared to be. Not like the purple robe, the crown of thorns, and the hollow reed, thrust upon him by brutal soldiers in mockery, do the miracles of Christ appear in their connexion with him. The hands, the head, the beating heart, are not more truly portions of the entire human body, than the wonders wrought by him are members of his being, life of his life, spirit of his spirit. And besides, not only are they parts of him, contributing to complete and reveal his unity, if the theory I have endeavoured to set forth is correct, they are Nature's own works too, or rather, God's, for they are new illustrations of the divine method as that may be discerned in the world of Nature and Providence.

But although the argument for the reality of the miracles is, in this view, complete and impregnable, it is by no means improbable that, on some few occasions, the impressions of the witnesses, and consequently their statements, were affected by their sensibilities. Eyes dilated with wonder, overshadowed by awe, could not always see things in their exact proportions. Indeed it would hardly be natural, had it been otherwise. Were it shown that the eye-witnesses of that wonder-scene, the Life of Jesus, were never misled in this way, it would not confirm, it might stagger our faith, for it is contrary to all we know of human nature, that men,

with human hearts—human feelings, and with that most stirring train of events passing before their eyes, should have had no inclination produced to exaggerate common events, no state of mind unfavourable to a uniformly calm and correct observation.

It appears, indeed, from the Records, that the miracles of Jesus took the disciples and the people by surprise—that even after they had heard of and seen the wonders wrought by him, they were startled upon every new occurrence of the kind as if they had not seen similar things just before. And this would imply that they had not been so affected and prepared for those wonderful demonstrations of power as we should expect they would have been after witnessing a few of his miracles. But it does not prove that no inclination for the marvellous was produced in them, or that they were not all on tip-toe for supernatural appearances. It shows this, and this only, that they were wholly unprepared for such miracles as Jesus wrought—that his power, when it was manifested, transcended all their expectations—displayed itself in unlooked for forms and ways. So is it in nature and providence. The huge Creation that environs us challenges our wonder, and the motions and workings of things stimulate the imagination, and we fill the wide waste of possibility with the wildest fabrics. And yet after all, when new marvels of nature pass before us, they always take us by surprise; for, active as man's imagination is, it must be utterly and for ever baffled in its attempt to anticipate what Nature will do, or how she will do it. Crowds followed Jesus to witness wonders, but not one of all the throng could conjecture how he would exercise his power.

But while they were unprepared for the precise miracles which he wrought, it would be inconsistent, as

I have remarked, with all our knowledge of human nature to suppose that, amidst such exciting scenes, their sensibility to the wonderful was not quickened to a peculiar degree. And if they were thus affected, it is hardly possible that their narrations should not betray some traces of this influence. It appears, I apprehend, to have modified the accounts of the Resurrection of Jesus.

There is one incident, commonly held to be a miracle and so represented in the records, which, (I am disposed to believe,) receives much, if not the whole, of its supernatural character from the excited state of their minds, who were immediately concerned in it, and from whom the accounts of the event have been derived. I refer to the Transfiguration.

Upon a first examination of the passages which relate this occurrence, I am struck with the Jewish air which invests it. It savours strongly of Jewish ideas. It represents Jesus as arrayed with a material, visible, glory, his face shining as the sun, and his person clad in garments of unearthly whiteness. I confess I have difficulty in recognising him in this garb. The glory which possessed his mind, and to which he aspired, was purely moral, such as no eye hath seen or can see. He did not look forward to the possession, either in this world or the world to come, (if I have studied his words aright) of outward pomp, external splendour. Besides, his appearance at the Transfiguration seems also to sanction the earthly conceptions which are so prevalent concerning the other world, that it is a state of visible glory, whose inhabitants are arrayed in robes of white, and surrounded by a material magnificence. I cannot understand Christianity as authorising any such impressions. The Heaven of which it speaks and to which

it points us is not above nor afar off, it is not any where in space, but it is every where where there is a heart lighted up with truth and holiness. This is the doctrine of Jesus Christ. So that the Transfiguration, as it is commonly represented, militates against the whole tone of Christianity. It wants the spirituality which is the essence of this religion.

Again. According to Luke, "Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep" when the Transfiguration began, and "when they were awake they saw his glory and the two men that stood with him." "Heavy with sleep." This phrase expresses merely a state of drowsiness, and therefore it does not convey the sense of the original. The words in the original, "*βεβαρημένοι ύπνῳ*," signify that the disciples were sunk in a deep sleep. They were in a sound slumber, out of which they awoke to behold the glorious vision. Now every plain principle of investigation enjoins it on us to scrutinise the accounts, given by men in this situation, of what they saw, when, just waking from sleep, they could not have collected their powers, or been at all prepared for calm and accurate observation.

It is not said that the Transfiguration took place at night, but there is reason to suspect that it was at night that these things occurred. That the disciples were asleep furnishes some ground for this inference. They that sleep sleep in the night. It is not likely that Jesus would have retired during the day for purposes of devotion and prayer. He was accustomed to spend nights in prayer. If then the transfiguration happened after nightfall, here is an additional reason why we should examine this account with great care. Good men and wise are liable to be mistaken under such circumstances. At all events, whether it was in the

night or the day, the condition of the witnesses makes it our plain duty to weigh the narratives well.

Upon a closer examination of the records it appears beyond dispute, that the principal particulars related took place all at once, co-incidentally. "*As Moses and Elias departed,*" Peter spake, saying, Lord, it is good for us to be here, and let us build, &c. "*And while Peter was speaking,*" a cloud came up, and a voice came from the cloud. "*And when the disciples heard it,*" they fell on their faces and were sore afraid. So that almost at the same moment, Moses and Elias were disappearing, Peter was speaking, the cloud was coming up and overshadowing the group, the voice was coming from the cloud, and the disciples were falling on their faces overpowered with fear. All this is implied, or rather distinctly stated, in the narratives. We are not told explicitly when the disciples awoke, or what it was that awakened them. But we are given to understand that the vision commenced before they awoke.

Such are the considerations suggested by a cursory view of the different accounts of the Transfiguration. But it is not my purpose merely to start difficulties. I proceed to state what appears to me to be the truth of the case.

About a week before the Transfiguration, Jesus inquired of his disciples what the people thought of him, whom they supposed him to be. He had not declared himself to be the Messiah, and he desired to know what opinions were entertained of him. To his questions, the disciples reply, 'Some say that thou art Jeremiah, and some Elias, or one of the old Prophets.' From which we gather, what indeed may be known

from other sources, that the Jews expected, whenever the Messiah should appear, that some of the old Prophets would re-appear also, and aid him in the renovation of all things. Jesus then inquired what they themselves, the disciples, thought of him. Peter with characteristic forwardness answered for the rest : "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." The promptitude and explicitness of this reply evidently gratified Jesus. So we may judge from the fervent and emphatic benediction which he immediately pronounced upon Peter. It argued, as I elsewhere observe, the greatest ingenuousness in the disciples to have come so early to this conclusion, notwithstanding the objections which the lowly and pacific appearance of Jesus must have suggested. Nothing could be more directly opposed to the Jewish idea of the Christ than the whole manner of his life. Finding that his disciples believed him to be the Messiah, he begins to speak freely of himself and his approaching fate, after having first enjoined it on them to speak of him to no one as the Christ. He tells them that he is going to the capital, Jerusalem, there to suffer much, and be put to death, and that he would rise from the dead. Although they believed him, or rather, because they believed him, to be the Christ, this language shocked them. That the Messiah should suffer indignity and violence was a thought which they could not endure, an idea they could not entertain. And Peter, ever forward to speak, presumptuously rebuked Jesus and met a severe reproof. Jesus then goes on to assure them in the same connexion that there were some of them who would see the kingdom of God coming in great glory before they died—that the great dispensation was close at hand.

I consider this conversation between Jesus and his

disciples as constituting an era, so to speak, in the progress of the latter. Now they had it upon his own word that he was the Christ, and he had declared most distinctly that the heavenly reign, the splendid coming of the Messiah, the event so long foretold, so passionately looked for, was near. Soon they expected that He whom they attended would throw off his coarse raiment, that he would stand forth arrayed in robes of more than regal costliness, that the majestic old prophets and patriarchs would re-appear, and, encircling the Anointed of Heaven, would attend him on his glorious way, and aid him in redeeming Israel and regenerating the nations. And they themselves, those obscure men, humble fishermen, whose world hitherto the shores of the Lake of Galilee had bounded, what honours and glories awaited them, the earliest adherents, the friends and favourites of the great king! These magnificent visions must have crowded on them until their very hearts ached with the intensity of their imaginings and hopes. The ardent and excitable mind of Peter particularly, how must it have been stirred to its very depths! Nothing but the serene authority of Jesus prevented them from being carried away, out of themselves, by their kindling expectations.

In this state of mind, Peter, James and John, the three whom Jesus had particularly distinguished, and who had every hope of occupying conspicuous offices in the celestial kingdom, accompanied their Master up the mountain, whither he went for the sake of retirement and devotion. Exhausted by the excitement of their present manner of life and their dazzling prospects, they fell into a deep sleep, Jesus being withdrawn a short distance engaged in meditation and prayer. The visions which engrossed his waking thoughts, returned naturally and vividly to the mind of

Peter in his sleep, and he dreamt that he saw his master invested with all that outward glory, which he had now for some time believed that Jesus would shortly assume. He dreamt also, as it was so natural for a Jew to dream, that he beheld two of the ancient prophets, Moses and Elias, conversing with Jesus, and the topic of their conversation was that strange event which Peter had been informed by his master was to take place at Jerusalem, and which, perplexing and shocking the mind of Peter, had made so powerful an impression on him that it connected itself with his dreams. Thus far, I conceive, the transfiguration was the vision of Peter in his sleep. James and John were sleeping all-unconscious and dreamless at his side.

While Peter was thus dreaming, a cloud arose and rolled over the mountain, "a cloud of light," or, "a bright cloud." It certainly is not necessary to suppose that there was any thing extraordinary in this circumstance. As the spot was elevated, the cloud hung low, passed very near the group, and appeared to encircle and overshadow them. It was attended co-instantaneously we may suppose with lightning (and therefore it is called a bright cloud) and thunder. These startled Peter from his vision. To his mind in this half waking state, Moses and Elias naturally appeared to be vanishing. In this condition and at this instant, with the impressions of his dream still vivid, he exclaimed in great excitement, "Lord, it is good for us to be here, and let us build three tabernacles, one for thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias." He would fain have detained the departing prophets. He could have staid there for ever in such blessed company.

One of the narratives, in reference to this exclamation of Peter's, states that he "knew not what to say, for he was sore afraid," and the language of another is,

“not knowing what he said ;” which tends to confirm the inference that, up to this point, the vision had been seen only by Peter. For if all three, Peter, James, and John, saw Moses and Elias, had they all been awake, beholding the old prophets, I see not how it could have been said that Peter knew not what he was saying. The idea which he expresses is surely a perfectly coherent and a very appropriate one, the presence of Moses and Elias being supposed, and one too which his companions, had they too perceived the presence of the prophets, must have understood and joined in with all their hearts. But if we suppose that James and John knew nothing of what had thus far been confined exclusively to the imagination of Peter, until they were suddenly startled from sleep, probably by the thunder and the sound of Peter’s voice, and that then they heard him talking of building tabernacles, and of Moses and Elias, and observed his bewildered condition, we perceive how natural it is that they, wholly at a loss at the moment to understand what Peter said, should conceive and say that he knew not what he was saying.

Startled thus suddenly from their slumbers, they heard Peter speaking with a rapid, agitated voice, the thunder rolling, and it may be, that at the same moment the lightning flashed upon and illuminated the person of Jesus, and they instantly fell prostrate on their faces. Jesus came and raised them up, and they looked round and beheld no one but Jesus only.

The thunder, that mysterious phenomenon as it particularly was in those days, occurring at such a juncture, when the idea of Jesus as the Glorious Messiah was fixed in their minds, sounded like the articulate voice of God. It was God speaking from the cloud, and the one engrossing idea of Jesus as the Son of God gave instant and distinct meaning to the awful sound.

By the boundless power of the imagination the outward and sensible phenomenon was shaped and modulated into the expression and symbol of the one overpowering feeling. It is not probable, nor is it at all necessary to suppose, that all three so interpreted it. If, while two of the three had only the impression of a startling sound, the third (Peter) instantly conceived it to be a Voice from Heaven, the powerful and more definite conviction of this last, falling in with the excited state of feeling in his companions, would have swept away and superseded their less distinct impressions. That is, to speak more plainly, if one had declared that he heard articulate words, the rest would have had neither the power nor the disposition to dispute it, or rather they were fully prepared to give into the belief that a Voice had spoken. For had they not heard the sound? And would they not naturally have felt that it was only their fright and bewilderment which prevented them from seeing, hearing and understanding more distinctly?

It will be objected that the accounts all give us to understand that the Transfiguration was visible to all three—that they all saw Moses and Elias, whereas according to the above representation, it was Peter alone to whom the Prophets appeared, and to him in a dream. I have proposed no hasty conjecture. It is justified, I conceive, by a fair consideration of the circumstances, and particularly of the condition of the three disciples at the moment. Honest and intelligent as they were, they were still men of a humble rank, who had recently been called in the providence of God to witness the most extraordinary events, and whose minds were kindled with dazzling thoughts of coming splendour and greatness. They were looking almost momentarily for a revolution by which they would be transformed into

the dignitaries of a heaven-established Empire, and the whole world would be changed. In this state of mind they had gone up with him, whose way was strewn with miracles, on a mountain where they had fallen into a deep sleep, out of which they had been awakened by startling sounds, only to be overcome by a passion of fear so great that they immediately bowed themselves down to the ground. That persons in such a state, were they the keenest-eyed and the truest-hearted, were in no condition for correct observation—that their statements of what then took place are to be received with the greatest caution, will hardly be denied. It appears to me only less clear that they would all fall in with that one of their number who undertook to give the fullest and most distinct account of what had occurred on the occasion. The mind of one of them may have been so highly exalted that to his ears the sound, which they all heard, was as the voice of God, and if he affirmed that to him it seemed to speak in audible tones in attestation of Jesus as the Son of God, the other two would instantly imbibe the same idea, for they had nothing to say against it, and all that they had seen and heard went to confirm it. They naturally caught the impression that what they had witnessed was a part of the extraordinary spectacle, of which one of their number had seen the whole ; and so the case is stated as if they all had seen the whole. Every one of the three felt that he had seen and heard enough to entitle him to be considered and to consider himself as a witness of the whole occurrence, of which one of them gave an account so consistent with the impressions of all, that probably they could not say precisely how much or how little they saw and heard.

In presenting this view of the Transfiguration, which

seems to me to be authorised by a consideration of the circumstances of the occasion, and of the laws of our nature in general, I stand upon the ground that we are never at liberty to suppose extraordinary agency in any case, unless there is no other supposition which will meet and explain the case. We are not permitted to bring new and unusual causes into view, when common and more familiar causes will account for the facts. This is one of those first principles of inquiry which no man can disregard and retain the character of an enlightened and trust-worthy seeker of truth.

If it be asserted that, by this method of interpretation, all the miracles might be explained as ordinary events, I say in reply, if it can be done, let it be done. If, from considerations founded upon the particular circumstances, and the general principles of human nature, it can be shown that the miracles recorded in the New Testament are merely common events misapprehended, in the name of truth let it appear. But this never can be shown. Let these great facts be exposed to the freest and most searching investigation, so it be only fair. Scrutinise them through and through. Let all possible weight be given to the least of their details which might seem to furnish room for the suspicion that there was nothing uncommon in them after all. I have unlimited confidence that the only conclusion will be that they took place as they are represented, that they occurred instantaneously at the will and word and touch of Jesus of Nazareth.

Once perfectly convinced of the truth of the miracles, knowing through our own consciousness what faith is, we shall be able to sympathise in some degree with the state of mind which must have been produced in those who witnessed them. We shall then see how naturally and inevitably misapprehensions were occa-

sioned by the force of those very feelings which the miracles excited. When I think what stupendous miracles they actually saw, I cannot cease to wonder that their misapprehensions were so few—that the witnesses of the life of Jesus so seldom mistook the ordinary for the extraordinary. In two instances, it appears to me, they did fall into this mistake, first, on the occasion of the Transfiguration, and again at the resurrection of Jesus, when the woman, who visited the sepulchre, mistook Jesus himself and certain startling appearances for angelic visitants. Every thing tends to show that those, who were on these occasions misled, were in a state of bewilderment, of which they themselves fully inform us, evincing not the slightest inclination to conceal the fact, a state, in which it would have been a very suspicious circumstance indeed, had they fallen into no error. It could have contributed nothing to a just confidence in them, but would have argued in them a very strange want of the common sensibilities of our nature. After all, the wonder is, to repeat, not that in two instances, and it may be in some few others, although I know of none, they erred, but that their impressions were so pervadingly correspondent with the facts; not that they misapprehended so much, but so little; a wonder which brings home to us the conviction that they were men of excellent good sense and of uncommon truthfulness of mind, the friends and associates of one whose calm and steady influence subdued the tumults of their spirits and qualified them to see and hear aright.

To return to the Transfiguration, in explanation of which a few words more remain to be said.

We have in the histories of Jesus three several notices of a voice from Heaven. There was a voice at

his baptism, at the Transfiguration, and upon one other occasion when Jesus, surrounded by the people, uttered the prayer, "Father ! Glorify thy name," and there came a voice from heaven, saying, "I have glorified it and will glorify it again." The precise nature of the fact that occurred upon these three several occasions must be determined, so far as it can be determined at all, by the particular circumstances of each case. I am led to think that there was a sensible phenomenon, thunder, at the Transfiguration, and not at the baptism, because it is stated in the account of the former that a cloud came and hung over the place, and nothing of this kind is mentioned in connexion with the baptism. With regard to the other instance of a heavenly voice, it is observable that the narrator tells us that the people who stood by said it thundered, from which we may safely infer that the sound was not equally articulate to all the by-standers. Others said that it was an angel speaking to Jesus, a mode of describing the fact which implies that they did not understand what was said. For had they heard the precise words which are given as the words of the voice, they would have said, not that an *angel* spake, but that it was God himself speaking. "I have glorified it and will glorify it again," is a declaration which could have been referred to God alone. In this case also I am led to suspect that the voice was thunder, which, always significant of a superhuman presence, was particularly so at such a juncture.

If the foregoing account of the Transfiguration is correct, why, it may be asked, did not Jesus set his friends right. For my own part I do not see how he could have treated the case otherwise than as he did. He saw that their minds had been powerfully im-

pressed. It was probably with Peter chiefly that he talked about it, and when this disciple declared with the strongest marks of conviction what he had seen, Jesus could not dispute the vision. He saw that its effect was to increase the faith of Peter and the rest. And he contented himself with enjoining it on them not to mention what had happened until after his disappearance, for the same reason obviously for which he had a week before charged them to tell no man that he was the Christ. Had his personal attendants spoken of him publicly as the Messiah, it would have been equivalent to a personal declaration of himself, and would have increased beyond all control the prevalent excitement, already so great that it called for his utmost vigilance.

Notwithstanding all that has been said, and my single and predominant aim to establish the reality of the life of Jesus, with its attendant miracles, this chapter may be thought by some to be intended to explain away a supernatural event. I do not content myself with a simple denial of the truth of the charge. I pray the reader who may be disposed to entertain this suspicion to consider how much faith this view of the Transfiguration presupposes. It requires a full belief in the previous miracles recorded, because it is only such extraordinary circumstances that could have thrown the minds of Peter and James and John into such a state of bewilderment. This account will appear natural and true, only as we admit the reality of all that had gone before. It is based upon the truth of all the substantial facts of the history. Such a dream and such misapprehensions could not have had an existence, if Jesus had not previously wrought miracles, if the conversation between him and his disciples, recorded

to have taken place about six or eight days before, had not occurred, if, in fine, precisely the state of things and the series of events related in the Gospels, had not existed. So far from affecting in the slightest degree unfavourably the general truth of the history, this view of the Transfiguration springs from it like a plant from the root, and is an evidence that the root is there. Error, it may be affirmed generally, implies the truth, and exactly in the degree in which we are able to discover the shape and the character of the error, we have a means of estimating the size and form of the truth.

CHAPTER X.

THE PROPHET.

"—Thou prophetic spirit that inspirest
The human soul of universal earth!"

WORDSWORTH.

THE object of this chapter is, to illustrate the prophetical character of Jesus, to show how satisfactorily he is proved in the histories of his life to have been possessed of an extraordinary knowledge of future events.

I wish first, however, to make some remarks upon the nature of his Prophetical Gift.

Whether he pierced the veil of Futurity by special, instantaneous inspiration of God, or by the natural intuition of his own wonderfully endowed being, I do not pretend to determine, I do not know. But one thing is very plain. I cannot shut my eyes to the analogy that presents itself between the prophetical power of Jesus and the very nature of all mind.

All things are in an infinite variety of ways interwoven with one another—great and little, high and low, past, present and future. The knowledge of any one thing involves an acquaintance with numberless other things. How far into the depths of the Past hath the eye of Science penetrated, simply by surveying the present appearance and condition of the earth! What mighty and remote revolutions hath the human mind

predicted by observing the present positions of the heavenly bodies! Nay, is not our very nature as it exists in all men, in a feeble degree perhaps, but still in a certain sense, prophetic? What is this yearning that we have towards the Future, or, to say no more, the bare idea of the Future, what is it but the germ of prophecy in the human soul! It reveals at least the desire and capacity of foreknowledge—that faculty of our being, which, let us only advance as we may, and as we feel that we ought, will qualify us to receive whatever communications of foreknowledge may be made to us here or hereafter, and however they may be made. Beautifully, but not more beautifully than truly, has it been said,

“ Know’st thou *Yesterday*, its aim and reason !
Work’st thou well *To-day* for worthy things !
Then fear not thou the morrow’s hidden season,
But calmly wait what hap soe’er it brings.”

But why fear not the Future? Why calmly wait? Because to the mind that wisely listens to the Past and faithfully uses the Present, there must come the assured conviction that the Future has in store for it no real evil. To know so much of Futurity as this, though we should never know more, is it not prophetic knowledge? To know and feel that the Everlasting Future can do us no harm, surely this is to see with a prophet’s ken! But some minds have seen further and more clearly into the coming Time than others.

Their knowledge of futurity was the result of no process of reasoning—no weighing of probabilities. It was not the product of calculation. It was Sight. And they saw not the visible world with the outward eye more distinctly than they foresaw what they foretold. Such were the ancient prophets. “Abraham,” said

Jesus, "*saw* my day and was glad." The eye of the body is but a dim type of the eye of the prophetic soul. But never in the flesh have we had such a manifestation of prophetic vision as in Jesus Christ. He has cast all other prophets into the shade. His prophetic ability came not by education nor by reasoning. It was a special gift of God. Still its whole manifestation in the life of Jesus is in perfect harmony with nature. It is new, unprecedented, but still analogous to all that we see and know of mind, of spirit. And thus it reveals upon itself the Divine Signature, and proves that it is the inspiration of the Father of Spirits.

Wonderfully endowed as Jesus was, he could not but be a prophet. I pray the reader to ponder the case well. I would disclose to him new grounds of faith.

While on earth, as the Gospel of John declares, the Son of Man was in Heaven, in that spiritual and eternal world where no veils of time circumscribe the view. Having the purest moral sense, he saw the moral aspects, circumstances, relations, destinies, of the scene in which he stood. And this was equivalent to having the fundamental laws, causes and elements of things laid bare to him. He knew himself and those around him. "I know," said he, "those whom I have chosen." Are we not able, therefore, to track, a little way at least, that mysterious power of intuition or inspiration—I know not its name, certain only that it is divine—by which he foretold his own fate, the fate of his nation, even to many minute particulars, the treachery of one of his disciples, the cowardice of another, and the desertion of all! His foreknowledge was marvellously profound and accurate. How does it draw aside the veil which hides from us the wonderful powers of the spiritual world, revealing to us a spirit commanding disease and death, and penetrating into Fu-

turity! But altogether unprecedented as was the prophetic knowledge of Jesus, it was still limited. The precise time when that national catastrophe would take place which he predicted, he declared he did not know. It was known only to God.

The view I take of the prophetic character of Christ seems to me the simplest, most natural, and unspeakably the most vital, and to take much less for granted than the popular theory of the case. This, like the popular idea of the miracles, appears to be founded upon the unconscious, but most extravagant assumption, that the whole order of things, material and immaterial,—all the forces and limits of that mighty spirit, which is around and within us—are perfectly known; that God, instead of being ALL IN ALL, sits ‘outside,’ having delegated the care of all ordinary matters to another power, the order of Nature, and that when any thing occurs out of the little circle of the experience of man, child of yesterday! then only is His arm stretched forth. According to this popular impression, the prophetic utterances of Jesus are not recognised as the natural issues and expressions of a mighty spiritual Power working in or with his spirit. But as such, we ought, by all sound principles of thought, to regard them, so long as the spiritual world to which he belonged, and which is all around and within us, remains an unexplored deep. That deep must not be hidden from us by a theory of the Mode of the Divine Existence and Government, constructed out of false, human analogies, and confidently reposed in by multitudes, among whom are many wise and many great, as if it were the living temple of truth, not made with hands! Rather does it become us to lie prostrate with trembling awe and humility, at the gates of the un-

known world, which stand open within us, waiting for I know not what demonstrations of power to issue therefrom, and trying, by the light of their coming, to penetrate the unfathomable abyss. An awful voice of power and prophecy has been heard in the world. We overlook the actual utterer. It is true he bore the semblance of a man, and human was the voice that spake. But there was in him, as there is in every human shape, the transcendent mystery of a spirit, and until we have solved that, and ascertained that the Almighty is not *here*, that his kingdom is not within us, his throne not in our hearts, we ought not to turn elsewhere to track the goings of his power.

In accordance with the foregoing views I remark, that the prophetic declarations of Jesus were among his most simple, natural, characteristic utterances. They are not announced with any formal peculiarity of tone or manner. They illustrate him. "Why can I not follow thee now?" said Peter, "I will lay down my life for thy sake." "Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake?" replied Jesus, "verily I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow till thou hast disowned me thrice." How, save by the inspiration of God, he foresaw Peter's denial of him, I am utterly ignorant. And yet, though there were an immediate influx of supernatural light into his mind, I see no reason to decide that the laws of his spiritual being were interrupted. The divine inspiration, so far from overlaying, concurred with his native energies and elevated them. All that I can see and know of the Man of Nazareth, creates the presumption that he was fitted for extraordinary communications from Heaven. Being such as we all believe him to have been, with his piercing spiritual eye, his thorough knowledge of Peter's character, his

frequent experience of Peter's weakness, how is it possible that he could have been without some foresight of the conduct of Peter in the approaching crisis? And his unsurpassed moral elevation prepared him to be the recipient of I know not what higher lights and aids; and this without the least violation of the laws of mind.

Again. When I consider the great end to which he felt himself—his whole being, irrevocably bound, and the numerous and overpowering manifestations of an opposing spirit, which he encountered at every step, it seems to me utterly impossible that the result could have been wholly hidden from his eyes. He knew his own unalterable purpose. He knew the temper of the times. The very excitement he produced revealed the coarse worldly bent of the people; that inveterate Jewish hope, which he saw he must disappoint at the cost of his life. "Many," says John, "believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man."

Once more. The effect of his ministry—how must it have laid bare to him the inmost depths of the Jewish character, the Jewish national existence! He saw that the public heart was bound up in the hope of a grand outward political revolution. The transcendent power he was putting forth, though destined ultimately to triumph, in its immediate action had no influence, but to excite the worst passions. He must have seen that the nation was rushing madly on into a collision with that mighty Roman domination, by the bare idea of which it was so much chafed, a collision that would grind it to atoms. He saw that his country was ani-

mated by no principle that could control its destiny. If it had been, how was it that his mighty voice was powerless! A short time before his death, he approached Jerusalem, attended by a vast multitude. They rent the air with triumphant shouts, but he was not deceived. He saw the popular feeling was excited by the belief that he would prove the great national Deliverer. And in this false expectation, he read the fate of the nation so clearly, that when he came in sight of the city, he wept, exclaiming, 'O that thou hadst known, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days will come upon thee, when thine enemies will cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and enclose thee and thy children within thee on every side, and will level thee with the ground, and not leave in thee one stone upon another; *because* thou knewest not this season of thy visitation.'

I wish to be distinctly understood. I do not believe that any other man could have foreseen what Jesus foresaw. I doubt not that he looked into Futurity by the inspiration of God. But then we entirely forget the high spiritual eminence at which he stood, and his profound moral wisdom, when we deem it necessary to suppose that the laws of his spiritual being were suspended in order that he might receive these extraordinary communications of foreknowledge. The prophetic spirit in him shows itself in harmony with his whole nature. And herein, as I said, we have evidence that it was divine.

That a knowledge of future events was given to Jesus Christ somewhat in the way I have described, appears to be intimated by his expostulation with the Pharisees. 'What!' he does in effect exclaim, 'ye can

understand the face of the sky and predict the changes of the weather. Pretenders! Can ye not discern the signs of the times?

It is not, however, my chief purpose now to ascertain the mode in which the Founder of Christianity became possessed of a knowledge of events then hidden behind the veil of futurity. My present topic is the fact that he did know the future—that he was a prophet, a great prophet, however we may conceive of a prophet. I wish to show how naturally and incidentally it appears in the records of his life that he was possessed of a clear and wonderful knowledge of what was to happen. This is our present point, the fact and not any theory of the fact. And I say I know not which is most remarkable, the prophetic gift of Jesus, or the all-unconscious way in which his possession of such a gift is made known in the Gospels.

If an individual, wholly unacquainted with the New Testament, were simply told that Jesus Christ is described therein as possessing a singular knowledge of future events, he might naturally enough think and say that he was so described by his biographers, merely to magnify him. But this suspicion, natural as it may be in the first instance, must be felt to be wholly out of place, when we examine the records, and see how decisively the absence of any such intention is shown.

Shortly after the public appearance of Jesus, a Roman officer sent to him to come and heal one of his household suffering severely with palsy, and he had turned his steps towards the centurion's house, when the centurion himself met him, and declared that he was not worthy of so great an honour as a visit from Jesus; that it was not necessary he should trouble himself to

go to the house. For if he, the centurion, being himself under authority, could yet say to one servant, go, and to another, do this, and be instantly obeyed, surely Jesus had only to say the word and the disease would immediately depart. The faith of the Gentile filled Jesus with astonishment ; he turned to those who were with him, and declared that he had no where, not even among his own nation, found such faith ; and then follow the memorable words, " And I say unto you, That many shall come from the East and the West, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast into the darkness without." Here we may discern his prophetic inspiration. Through the faith of the centurion, as through a rent in the darkness around him, he gazed into futurity and beheld what we all now see. This declaration has now become undisputed history. From all regions multitudes have been gathered under the Christian dispensation, brought into spiritual fellowship with the great and good—with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with the righteous of all times, while those, who in the days of Jesus deemed themselves the peculiar heirs of the heavenly gift, are standing without. In these words I hear the voice of a great prophet. By the kingdom of Heaven, it is hardly necessary that I should say, is not meant the future world of bliss, but the heavenly dominion of truth, in other words, the empire of true Religion. It is spoken of under the figure of a kingdom, where the patriarchs are seated at a brilliantly lighted festival, while those, who refuse to enter and partake of the feast, are represented as shut out into the darkness outside. This declaration of Jesus, eminently prophetic as it is, wonderfully verified as it

has been, comes in in the most natural manner imaginable, and has a living connexion with the passage where it occurs.

Again. In the sixteenth chapter of Matthew, we have the following : " From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." Is it suspected that this passage is a mere fabrication, inserted into the history with a view to invest Jesus with the character and reputation of a Prophet ? Every trace of such a suspicion vanishes when we observe the beautiful, because unconscious, consistency of this portion of the history with what precedes and what follows. " From that time forth," so this passage commences, " began Jesus to show his disciples how he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer and die." From what time ? Why, immediately after he had ascertained that his disciples acknowledged him as the anointed messenger of God. As soon as he found that they explicitly recognised his authority, he began to disclose to them what was about to take place. So that this passage comes in just where it ought to come in, in order to harmonise with the connexion. But this is not all. The disclosure of his approaching sufferings and death on this occasion is incidentally connected with a striking and most natural illustration of the character of Peter. When Jesus spake of what he must suffer, " Peter took him," we are told, " and began to rebuke him, saying, ' Be it far from thee, Lord : this shall not be done unto thee.' " But he turned and said unto Peter, ' Get thee behind me, Satan ; thou art a stumbling-block to me : for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that

be of men.'” What! Is this Peter—the Rock, as Jesus a moment before named him, saying, that upon this Rock he would build his church, and the gates of Hell should not prevail against it—is this the man who is now addressed in the severest language of reproof, and pronounced a stumbling-block, a rock of offence?

O, tell me not there has been any garbling—any forgery here! If this portion of the history had not its deep foundations in truth and nature,—if it were a fiction, its author would never have dreamed of venturing apparently so gross an inconsistency, or, if he had, he would not have permitted it to go unexplained. In reality, there is here not only no inconsistency, but the most exquisite keeping, as I proceed to show.

Shortly before, as we read in the same chapter, Jesus had inquired of his disciples what the people thought of him—whom they supposed him to be. They replied, “Some say that thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, and others Jeremiah, or one of the old prophets.” He then put the question directly to the disciples themselves, “Whom do you think me to be?” Peter, with his characteristic forwardness, answers without hesitation, “Thou art the Anointed, the Son of the living God.” It disclosed great openness to the truth in Peter, to have come so speedily and confidently to the conviction, that in the humble man of Nazareth he beheld the long-looked for, magnificent Messiah. There was nothing in the external appearance of Jesus which proved him to be that illustrious personage, but much to the contrary. Since Peter then recognised him as the Christ, it could only have been through the moral, spiritual credentials which he gave in his beneficent words and works. Accordingly, Jesus breaks forth in blessing upon Peter, exclaiming, “Blessed art

thou, Simon, son of Jonas,* for the flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in Heaven!" i. e. "it is not from men, or from any earthly source, that thou hast discovered me to be the Messiah. It has been revealed unto thee by that true spirit in thine own soul, which is the Spirit of God." How naturally must the warm commendation of Jesus have tended to elate the ardent mind of Peter! This it was, we perceive, that emboldened him to contradict and rebuke Jesus, when the latter immediately afterwards proceeded to speak of his sufferings. Although he acknowledged Jesus to be the Christ, he was not at all prepared to believe that the Christ could suffer indignity and violence. Therefore he sought to silence Jesus, saying, "Be it far from thee, Lord, this shall not be done unto thee," and so drew upon himself that severe rebuke, "Away! thou enemy! Thou art a stumbling-block to me, for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men."

Thus we find that the prediction of his sufferings and death, which Jesus uttered on this occasion, is vitally connected with a portion of the history bearing the deep and living impress of truth, and it is impossible to doubt that he foretold his own fate to his disciples at this time.

But it is not from those passages alone in which he expressly predicts his own death, natural and consistent as they are, that we gather the most decisive evidences of his knowledge of the future. Most incidentally, and therefore all the more impressively, does it on many

* "*Simon, son of Jonas.*" The fervour with which this benediction was uttered, is incidentally and strikingly displayed in this mode of address. How naturally, when a friend communicates any unexpected sentiment or intelligence, do we express our surprise in a similar way, uttering the whole name of our friend, with fervent emphasis!

occasions appear that he was perfectly aware of what awaited him, and that he saw far and clearly into the depths of futurity.

Once two of his disciples, confident that he was about to establish a glorious worldly empire, induced their mother to solicit from him the favour that they, her two sons, might sit, the one on his right hand and the other on his left, when he should commence his triumphant reign. "Can ye drink of the cup," he instantly replies, "which I shall drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptised with?" How fully is the knowledge of his own sufferings here revealed in the unconsciousness with which they are taken for granted! The two brethren little dreamed what the nature of that distinction was which they sought, or how it was to be obtained; and, in the unthinking simplicity of their hearts, they answer that they are able to do whatever he was about to do. Their Master observes, in return, "Yes, ye shall drink of the same bitter cup, and pass through the same fiery baptism, but to sit on my right and on my left,—to share so fully in the power and distinction thus to be obtained, I can give only to those for whom it shall hereafter be found to be prepared in the providence of God."

How undesignedly is the knowledge which Jesus had of his own death laid bare to us in that beautiful incident which took place at Bethany! Mary, the sister of Lazarus, came and, standing over him, poured upon his head an alabaster box of very precious ointment, an act according with the customs of the times, that authorized the free use of precious perfumes and ointments upon occasions of hospitality, and whereby Mary gave expression to her deep personal reverence for Jesus. Some present were, or pretended to be, shocked at her extravagance, and exclaimed, "Why is this

waste? This ointment might have been sold for much and given to the poor." But Jesus said, "Why trouble ye the woman? She has performed an appropriate office for me. Ye have the poor always with you, but me ye have not always. In that she hath poured this ointment on my person, she has done it for my burial—to embalm me." I have no idea that Mary had any thought of his death and burial, or that Jesus meant to imply that she had. But this was simply the way in which he interpreted her act. How delicate and touching his allusion to the approaching termination of his career! "But me ye have not always." How naturally is the state of his mind revealed to us! How clearly do we see that he was fully possessed with a knowledge of his impending fate! When the mind is deeply engrossed with any subject, it readily discovers or creates a connexion between every thing that occurs and the absorbing topic of its thoughts. So was it with Jesus. Impressed with the conviction of his awful fate, so soon to be consummated, he received that expression of Mary's respect, the outpourings of the costly ointment, as a funeral office. To him it had the odour of death and of the tomb. Had he been actually dead, no one would have objected to the use made of the ointment which now descended upon his person, for the customs of the day sanctioned a liberal expense of spices and perfumes upon the dead. So near and so certain was his death to Jesus, that he speaks of himself as already dead, and represents this token of Mary's homage as a funeral office. Indeed, so much was his mind impressed with the coincidence between this act of Mary's, and the near approach of his death, that he declared in the full spirit of prophecy, that wherever the history of his life should be told, this incident should be related also. And so in fact it has happened. The prophecy, which

he needed no special inspiration to utter, has been fulfilled. "The odour of that ointment," as it has well been said, "was not confined to that lowly Jewish dwelling. It has filled the world."

In a like incidental manner, the fact that Jesus knew he was to die, and that he was also aware of the manner in which he was to suffer, is revealed in the very form of that event upon which the commemorative service of the Lord's Supper is founded. When seated at table with his personal friends, a short time before he was seized by his enemies, he broke bread and distributed it among those present, as a symbol of his body soon to be broken, and poured out wine and gave it to them as a like symbol of his blood. I do not believe, (and I deem it of the first importance to a just appreciation of this rite so to consider it,) that Jesus was conscious on this occasion of having formed a deliberate design to establish a particular service or institution. He spoke and acted, I think, from the simple and natural impulse of a touching sensibility. With his mind filled with the images of death and suffering, we have seen how naturally he associated the ointment which Mary poured upon his person with his embalming. So when he was seated for the last time with his disciples, the same state of mind—the same principle of association led him to see in the broken bread, and in the flowing wine, the symbols and mementos of his own body and blood. Thus hallowed by the deep sensibility of Jesus, shall they not be everlasting mementos! Shall not our hearts melt with answering tenderness, and can we disown or cancel the vows of gratitude and remembrance which Nature herself prompts!*

* When I contemplate Jesus breaking the bread, and pouring out the wine, in commemoration of himself, I cannot conceive of him as deliberately insti-

We cannot fail to perceive here how incidentally his prophetic knowledge is revealed. It is not explicitly and purposely disclosed. It appears only by implication. And this is the most satisfactory way possible.

In a similar way, but still more strikingly, the foreknowledge of Jesus appears in his answer to those who, on different occasions, demanded of him a sign. When he drove the money-changers from the Temple, and was immediately asked to produce the sign of his authority for so doing, his reply is, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it up." In this obscure allusion to his death and resurrection, how undesignedly is his foreknowledge of these events revealed! Again, when at another time a sign was demanded, his answer is, "an evil and adulterous generation is seeking after a sign, but no sign shall be given it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Here again how unconsciously is his knowledge of his death and resurrection implied! Had the narrators designed to ascribe to him a foreknowledge which he did not possess, they never would have wrapt up the evidences of it in such obscure allusions. The reference to the prophet Jonah, by the way, is wonderfully pointed; if, as we may with great probability sup-

tuting a positive rite. It is his heart that seems to me to be appealing to the universal human heart, and therefore this observance secures my cordial regard. When it is thus considered as originated, not so much by the understanding as the affections of Jesus, a service of commemoration, having him for its special object, appears to be among the most significant and affecting of our religious institutions, and to have an imperishable basis in the heart. It is too common to represent the Lord's Supper as a mere *means* of improvement. It is a means, a great means, but only because it is a great end. He who eats and drinks worthily at the Lord's table, eats and drinks not for his own sake, but for Christ's, and therefore he receives divine nourishment.

pose, those, who asked for a sign, desired to witness some dazzling exhibition of miraculous power. It is as if he had said, 'You are seeking a luminous and overpowering display of my authority. I tell you that the true sign of my authority will be given in events shortly to occur—(my death and resurrection,) which, so far from corresponding to your ideas of the Messiah's glory, can be likened to nothing among all the splendid signs and wonders of your history, so appropriately as to the humiliation of the prophet Jonah.'

But we have not by any means fathomed the depth of the miracle; we have caught but a glimpse of the real greatness of the prophetic character of Jesus, when we have seen simply that he foreknew his own death. He possessed a far deeper knowledge still. Every where throughout the histories of his life, we are given to understand, naturally, undesignedly, that he cherished a calm and perfect confidence in his own ultimate success. He saw and knew that Futurity was his. To what is this unparalleled faith attributable but to the profoundest prophetic inspiration? Here we have the fact of a young man, in a dark and corrupt age, of obscure birth, in the bosom of a bigoted nation, separated from all other nations by a great gulf of political and religious hatred, and on the brink of ruin—a young man without education or wealth, backed by no imperial warrant, not only unassisted by the spirit of the nation, and the age in which he appeared, but directly and vehemently opposed by the prevailing sentiments of the day, and the whole temper of his countrymen—we have, I say, the undisputed fact of an individual thus situated, unknown, friendless, powerless, and without any traces of human philosophy about him, undertaking a work of revolution, the most noble and

comprehensive, a work tending to nothing short of the thorough illumination and improvement of the whole race of man, a purpose of creating the world over again, and converting its savage tribes into beings dignified by knowledge, refined and blest by affection and kindness. I say nothing of the wonder that such a thought should have been entertained at such a time, and under such circumstances, although the bare conception of the thing, the mere expression of belief in its practicability, might well have been recorded among the inspired sayings of human wisdom, reflecting immortal honour upon any one who should have uttered it. But the circumstance that absorbs our attention is the quiet confidence, all so unobtrusively evinced, with which Jesus Christ lived and spoke and died in accordance with an aim so vast, that we should be almost ready to pronounce it chimerical, had not the lapse of ages begun to furnish some testimony to the possibility of its accomplishment. The great revolutions, commenced by other men, have in the course of a century or two exceeded in their actual results all that was contemplated by their original movers, spreading farther and going deeper than their authors dreamed. But not so is it with Christianity. The world has not yet realised the purpose of its Founder, although it has so nearly approximated it, that we cannot but feel that he was inspired with a mysterious and far-reaching wisdom.

The work which he began and so steadily pursued is no less astonishing for the originality of its methods, than for the comprehensiveness of its objects. Under the greatest disadvantages, disregarding all ordinary means of success, committing nothing to writing, elaborating no system, and with a world, in all the pride of its philosophy and all the glare of its power, arrayed

against him, he proceeded to fulfil his aim with a confidence as sublime for its calmness, as it was mysterious for its strength. If every human hand had been extended to aid him, and every human heart sealed to his service, he could scarcely have spoken and acted with a more unfaltering assurance that his labour would not be in vain, that the objects at which he aimed must be fulfilled. He went forth on his lonely and untried path, as if he were placed upon a mountain top, and saw his success written out upon the world lying at his feet ; as if every word that he uttered, instead of being caught up and perverted and turned against him as it was, were a spell, operating with magical rapidity and resistless power. Had his career been one unbroken triumph, he could not have exhibited a more settled conviction of ultimate success. Among a people burning with the fiercest passions, with the impatient hope of national dominion, he announced an empire whose glory is righteousness, whose laws are peace and love. In an age when religious worship was, in most places, scarcely better than a pageant, and religion was a thing of costly temples and long processions and glittering rites, he taught that the object of worship is a pure spirit, and that the service of God consists not so much in calling on his name, as in doing his daily will. Upon a corrupt and licentious world, he inculcated a purity of mind with which a look tending to sin is inconsistent. At a time when military prowess was the first of virtues, and heroes and conquerors were the world's saints, he exhibited a new model of greatness, revealing man's highest honour in humility, in forgiveness of injuries, and in sacredly abstaining from all violence. In opposition to superstitious observances and artificial duties, he vindicated the simple and despised laws of nature ; teaching that

to relieve a fellow-creature is more holy than to observe sabbaths, and that to a child the comfort of a parent should be more sacred than the treasuries of temples. His own nation was prostrate, and writhing under the oppression of Rome ; and, although he raised no banner and mustered no armies, yet he uniformly asserted that a kingdom was to be established into which multitudes from the four quarters of the earth should be gathered. Thus he lived, wrought, and died, never deserted by that faith in the future, which is one of the most imposing, most mysterious traits of his character.

But the wonder is not even yet exhausted. He not only foresaw his own death, and the ultimate triumph of his religion, he saw so clearly into Futurity that he discerned the connexion between these two events. It was not a blind assurance of success that he cherished. He knew that he should soon be put to death, under circumstances the most painful and ignominious ; that he should die misrepresented by the most, fully understood by none. And he felt that he should finally triumph, notwithstanding these circumstances apparently so fatal to every hope of success, aye, and in consequence of these very circumstances. He not only perceived that his death would not obstruct, he saw that it would directly and most gloriously aid the progress of truth. He foreknew his own fate, and what is far more astonishing, he understood and interpreted it. He discerned its end and issue. Here, I say, he evinced a depth of prophetic power altogether without precedent. " If I be lifted up," that is, on the cross, " I will draw all men unto me." Again, in that answer to the two brethren who wished to sit on his right hand and on his left in his kingdom, to which I have already referred ; how clearly does he show that he understood

the purport and result of the sufferings he was about to endure ! “ Can ye drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with ? ” How plainly does this language prove that the kingdom *he* was thinking of—the power which *he* sought, was a power to be gained over the affections of mankind, over their deepest sympathies, by the patient, voluntary endurance of suffering in their behalf ! In immediate connexion with this passage, he gives that fine definition of true greatness, a definition to whose perfect truth, the progress of government and society has borne most expressive testimony—“ He who would be greatest among you, let him be your servant.” To reign most gloriously over men, we must be ready to serve them even to the loss of every earthly blessing—of life itself. Consecrating his whole being to the service of man, prepared to pour out his blood like water in the cause of Truth, he saw with the clearest prophetic vision, that a glorious and everlasting dominion must be his. He trusted not, he needed not to trust to perishing paper and parchment to perpetuate his name and influence in the world, for he was writing out his laws upon the living tables of the heart, in his own life-blood. He knew that by drinking the bitter cup of death—by submitting to that fearful baptism, he was immortalizing his power ; he was making an appeal to the sympathies of the human soul, which could not be in vain. Those steps of suffering, which to all other eyes seemed to lead down into utter darkness, in his illuminated vision were seen to be a glorified ascent to the right hand of Eternal Power.

Again. Listen to that most remarkable language of his upon the occasion of his last visit to Jerusalem, shortly before his death. “ The hour is come that the son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say

unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone : but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." To those who heard these words they could scarcely have been intelligible. And yet we may perceive a deep and natural meaning here. The glory with which his mind was engrossed was the pure moral glory of an entire self-sacrifice. It was as evidently necessary in his view that he should suffer and die as he was about to do, as that the seed should be buried in the earth and undergo that natural, familiar, but mysterious change by which it is converted into a fruit-bearing plant. The process of vegetation was not more natural to his mind, than the dark and painful method by which he was to be glorified, and the triumph of his religion—the establishment of his kingdom consummated.

Once more. Let the reader turn to that declaration of his, to which I have referred before, uttered just after Judas had left him, to go and execute his traitorous purpose. The departure of Judas upon this base errand naturally enough caused Jesus to feel most vividly that the great crisis was at hand. Does he shrink at the dark prospect thus brought distinctly before him ? The glory of God flames upon his sight. "Now is the Son of Man glorified," he exclaims, "and God is glorified in him." The elevation of his mind and his language could not have been more remarkable, if a visible spectacle of the wide spread of his religion had at that moment been accorded him. This is to me the unspeakable wonder. He not only knew that he must die, but it is shown beyond all doubt that he knew his death would be the instrument of his signal success, that by dying as he was about to die he would be glorified as no other ever had been, and God would be glorified in him. Here is a depth and extent of inspira-

tion to which the whole world can bring no parallel. This it is that attests him as the first and greatest of Prophets. For what but a most extraordinary illumination of mind could have so interpreted his fate—a death of the deepest shame, overtaking him before he had fully communicated his great purpose to a single human mind, and to all human seeming, equivalent to an utter and inevitable defeat. And then too, how astonishing is it that, possessing this extraordinary knowledge, he was not elated by it, nor the balance of his mind in the slightest degree disturbed. He was still the most patient, the meekest of beings. There is nothing excited, nothing hurried, nothing incoherent in his manner. The Present was not lost sight of in the near and familiar view of the vast Future. He was still the most practical of teachers.

CHAPTER XL

THE MAN.

"To be tremblingly alive to gentle impressions, and yet to be able to preserve, when the prosecution of a design requires it, an immovable heart, amidst the most imperious causes of subduing emotion, is perhaps not an impossible constitution of mind, but it must be the rarest endowment of humanity."

FOSTER—*Essays*.

"The combination of the spirit of humanity, in its lowliest, tenderest form, with the consciousness of unrivalled and divine glories, is the most wonderful distinction of this wonderful character."

CHANNING.

I BEG leave here to admonish the reader, that I do not aim at any thing like completeness in the representation I have undertaken of the character of Jesus Christ. To prove the honesty of this disavowal, it is not necessary that I should indulge in any of those expressions of self-disparagement, by which one so seldom convinces others, and so often deceives himself. It is enough to say that since, after the lapse of eighteen hundred years, the moral significance of the life of Jesus remains unexhausted, I do not believe that it is now to be fathomed at a glance, even by the best and wisest. Nay, after a period of equal length a thousand times told, I am persuaded the treasures of moral life, truth, and beauty, hidden in Jesus Christ, will remain

absolutely inexhaustible. The least of the things of God in the humblest department of his universe presents an infinite variety of aspects, and opens an unfathomable depth for contemplation. It is not therefore to be for a moment supposed that, within any definite space, the character of Jesus will be so understood and appreciated, that little will remain to be told of it.

It would be easy enough to enumerate the virtues, and ascribe them all to him in a mass ; to heap upon him the phraseology of panegyric, and then fancy that we have completed his portrait. But the effect of his character has been injured by nothing, scarcely, so much as by the loose and indiscriminate manner in which it has been described. It has been divested of all vitality, by the general and unqualified language of praise, and converted into a dim and lifeless abstraction, a feeble personification of Virtue. It seems to have been thought that extravagance is impossible when Jesus Christ is the theme. And yet it may almost be questioned, whether those who have lavished upon him the loftiest terms of commendation, going the length of literally deifying him, have even caught a glimpse of his real greatness. It may be—I have no doubt that it is—beyond the power of language to do him justice. Still we are extravagant when we speak of him in terms that exceed our own distinct impressions, and allow ourselves to deal in vague generalities ; and the effect cannot but be injurious. It is very difficult, I know, to avoid falling into an exaggerated tone, when the heart has been touched in the slightest degree by pure moral beauty. I cannot flatter myself that I have wholly escaped this difficulty, I can only say that I endeavour anxiously to guard against it, and to justify the expressions of my reverence for Jesus by numerous and decisive facts, being chiefly desirous to

see clearly so far as I see, and recognising discrimination as of the first importance.

I propose to bring together in this chapter some of the particulars of the Life of Jesus which disclose the singular attributes of his mind; his personal greatness—his elevation, tenderness and magnanimity as an individual man. All his acts, rightly done, and all his words, fitly spoken, are, in fact, authentic manifestations of his personal qualities. Coming ever from the heart, they reveal the moral life of him, the spirit that made him the rare and original being that he was. His whole career, public and private, is a true, and, on the part of the histories, an unconscious, picture of his spirit. But, as I have just observed, I cannot presume to attempt a complete portraiture. Of any one passage of his life, I do not pretend to have caught all the beautiful and heavenly aspects, or discerned the deepest truth. Only such impressions of some of the details of his history, as it has been given to me to receive, do I venture to offer, begging the reader to remark the uniform absence of all ostentation and pains-taking every where apparent in the records.

For the most expressive manifestations of the mental and moral greatness of Jesus, I do not refer to those precepts of his, in which he inculcates universal charity and benevolence, the forgiveness of injuries and the overcoming of evil with good. The verbal lessons which he gave of these virtues are doubtless emphatic and eloquent. Still in no case are the words of an individual, taken by themselves, a decisive index of his spirit. It is possible to express the most comprehensive benevolence, and at the same time to be enslaved by the narrowest prejudices. Numerous enough are those

who are happily described by the author of the *History of Enthusiasm* as "closet-philanthropists, dreaming of impracticable reforms and grudging the cost of effective relief." I do not therefore appeal to the precepts of Christ, clear and beautiful as they are, to demonstrate the quality of his spirit.

In that prayer which burst from his heart amidst the agonies of crucifixion, what a greatness of soul is revealed! "Father! forgive them, for they know not what they do!" Oftentimes as this passage has been commented upon, I have sometimes thought that it has never been fully felt. The deep, natural, inextinguishable generosity of feeling which dictated it, appears to me to be enfeebled in the general apprehension, through the absence of a distinct impression of the persons for whom Jesus uttered this prayer. He is commonly supposed to have made this generous plea, in behalf of the whole multitude assembled around him, or of the Jews in particular. I will not deny that it was so. Still, when I attempt to picture the circumstances of that terrible occasion, I cannot feel that it is altogether a fanciful conjecture, especially since the connexion does not discountenance it,* to imagine that this prayer was uttered at the moment when the Roman soldiers were nailing Jesus to the bitter cross; and that it was under the torture which this operation caused, and with immediate reference to those savage executioners, as ignorant as they were cruel, that the sufferer prayed. I do not mean to imply that any present were excepted in his mind from this plea. But the incident receives new force in my view, when I consider this sublime ejaculation as bursting from his

* See Luke xxiii. 33, 34.

inmost soul, under ~~pet~~uliar and intense agony, and as referring immediately to those by whom the agony was inflicted. What a heart was ~~that~~ upon which the acutest suffering had no effect, but to prompt it to pray, and plead for those by whom the suffering was caused! Not in corroding bitterness, but in cleansing, healing streams of mercy, ~~did~~ the sensibility of that heart flow out over the very hands which were seeking to crush it, and were already stained with its blood! "Forgive them, for they know not what they do!" They must have been forgiven. If "the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much," this, the divinest prayer that God ever heard,

"Hymn'd by ~~ae~~changelas when they sing of Mercy,"

could not have ascended in vain. At some period of their existence in this state of being, ~~or~~ in another, the true knowledge of Jesus, as I cannot but believe, ~~must~~ dawn upon the minds of those savage men, ~~and~~ with that knowledge must come the remembrance of his unparalleled generosity, to dissolve their hearts in a saving, though bitter repentance, were those hearts harder than adamant. Thus we may see how the prayer of the Crucified secured its own fulfilment.

Between the Jews and the Samaritans, there subsisted a spirit of the fiercest animosity. They agreed in acknowledging the authority of the Mosaic Law, but they differed about the spot upon which the public religious ceremonies and services of their faith were to be observed; the Jews insisting that Jerusalem was the place to which the followers of Moses should resort to worship, ~~while~~ the Samaritans were equally zealous for their consecrated mount Gerizim. This comparatively

insignificant difference became a peculiar fountain of bitterness. It is the nature of religious hatred, as all experience testifies, to rage the most furiously between those sects that approach the nearest to each other, without entirely coalescing. It would seem that bigotry grows fiercer as its food is diminished. So at least it was in the case of the Jews and the Samaritans. They looked upon each other with the greatest dislike. It is interesting therefore to observe how Jesus is represented as bearing himself in this state of things. Here we have new and natural illustrations of the characteristic elevation of his mind. It was to a woman of Samaria, who, perceiving that he was no common person, asked his opinion concerning the true place for public worship, the ever-vexed point of dispute between her countrymen and the Jews, that he announced the only acceptable worship to be the act and service of the spirit. Once when he was going through Samaria, the Samaritans would not receive him, because it appeared that he was going to Jerusalem, passing by their consecrated mount. His disciples, enraged at the inhospitality of the Samaritans, wished to call down fire from Heaven upon them. "Ye know not," said Jesus, "what manner of spirit ye are of. The Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." This incident needs no comment. On one occasion a Jewish teacher came to Jesus proposing the great question—"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" In reply Jesus asked, "What is written in the Law? how readest thou?" The teacher replied, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul and with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself." To this Jesus rejoined, "Thou hast answered right. This do and thou shalt live." But the teacher of the Law, desirous of justifying himself, and showing that the question he

had put to Jesus was not so easily settled, asked in return, "Who is my neighbour?" In answer to this query, we have the parable of the good Samaritan, as it is called,—the story of a man going from Jerusalem to Jericho, and falling among thieves, and left by them half dead. A priest and a Levite pass by him without rendering him any assistance. But a Samaritan coming that way stops and binds up his wounds, and carries him to the nearest inn, and provides for his entire relief. Jesus concluded this parable by asking the teacher of Law which of these three was neighbour to him—the man from Jerusalem, the Jew—who had fallen among thieves. The reply of the teacher is, "He that showed mercy on him." Thus was he forced to confess that the Samaritan was neighbour to the Jew; and if so, then the relation was reciprocal, and it became the Jewish teacher to regard the Samaritan as his neighbour, the despised, hated Samaritan. How strikingly is the largeness of the mind of Jesus, his superiority to Jewish prejudices, revealed in this passage—in the bare idea of representing Jews and Samaritans as neighbours! When Jesus asked the Jewish teacher which was neighbour to him who fell among thieves, he replied, "He that showed mercy on him." I perceive, or fancy I perceive here, an incidental illustration of the prejudice of the Jew. He did not care, in answer to the question of Jesus, to say outright "the Samaritan." It went against his pride to utter that despised name—to acknowledge one bearing that name as his neighbour. So he compounds with his pride, and adopts, very naturally, a circumlocution, avoiding the mention of the Samaritan under that title, and replying, "He that showed mercy on him." It was obviously the intention of Jesus to make him confess that the Samaritan was his neighbour. The appeal was

absolutely irresistible, and although it was but little that he could do, yet he did what he could to save his own pride.

The fact that Jesus was on one occasion stigmatized as a Samaritan, would seem to be a tribute to his liberality; to his freedom from the bigotry with which his countrymen regarded the inhabitants of Samaria. I want no more expressive evidence of the vitality and comprehensiveness of the philanthropy of Jesus, than the way in which he is described as conducting towards those against whom the bitterest prejudices were cherished. That he recognised none of the artificial distinctions which control and contract human affections, I gather most decisively, not from those precepts of his which enjoin universal love, immortal as they are, but from his disregard of those divisions which existed immediately around him. It is easy enough, we know, to love distant and barbarous nations, or to cherish an interest in a remote posterity, and at the same time to foster a thousand narrow feelings towards those who are nearest to us. This is, unhappily, so much the character of the benevolence that we witness in modern times, that it is not until I see, as may be seen clearly, how free the Author of Christianity was from the bigotry which infected his nation and his time, that his precepts become to me genuine and authentic manifestations of his spirit. Let it only appear that he regarded those whom his countrymen most vehemently hated and denounced, the Samaritans,—let it be seen that he recognised them as men, as brethren, as objects for human sympathy and respect, then do I see in him the spirit of universal love. Then do I know by the most indubitable tokens, that his charity knew no artificial bounds; that it was a healthy and vigorous spirit flowing in every natural channel.

The moral greatness of Jesus is shown in his singular freedom from that sectarian or party spirit which has been in all times the crying sin of his followers. He stood alone, and must, on this account, have been not a little desirous of securing the countenance and encouragement of others. The genius of Christianity, as I have already remarked, shows us that its author must have been possessed of great sensibility, and capable of the deepest sympathy and affection. Christianity is eminent for the tenderness of its spirit, and thus it discloses the character of its Founder. To him therefore human co-operation must have been peculiarly dear, and if he had attached an undue value to human aid, it would not have been surprising. But the strong humanity of his nature never betrayed him into weakness, never broke in upon that uncompromising spirit with which he scrutinised the claims of all those who sought to be his disciples. While he publicly announced himself to the world as its Leader and Light, there are the most expressive evidences that he never tried to form a party. I cannot express the sense I have of the greatness of his character in this respect. Let me refer to one or two instances illustrative of this point.

On a certain occasion, when he was passing along the highway, attended by an immense concourse of people, he turned and said to them, “If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me.” I have briefly alluded to this incident before, but to perceive the deep significance of these words, let the reader call up before his imagination the circumstances under which they were uttered. Look at that strange and wonderful peasant of Nazareth, surrounded by that excited Jewish throng. Listen to the tread of innumerable feet. Observe those countenances kindling with

intense expectation, and reaching forward to catch a glimpse of the individual upon whom the public attention was now beginning to be fixed as the promised King, the heaven-sent Deliverer of the nation. How do the hearts of that crowd beat quickly with hope, waiting only for a signal from him to muster round his banner! But look! he turns and is about to speak. The multitude heaves with curiosity. How mysteriously must those words have sounded in their ears! "If any man will indeed follow me, let him take up his cross and come after me!" The cross is now a consecrated symbol, and we cannot, without an effort, distinctly conceive the deep infamy and agony once associated with that instrument of death. It was the custom of those condemned to be crucified, to carry their crosses to the places of crucifixion. To this custom Jesus alludes. And the sentiment he expresses is in effect this: "He who really means to follow me must be as fully prepared to suffer and die, as if he were already condemned, and were carrying his cross to the place of execution." Such a sentiment at such a moment—how convincingly does it show that he did not aim to bribe or flatter the populace! If they could take in his meaning, they must have been shocked beyond measure. Not for a moment did he lose sight of his true position. What an elevation of mind is there in his perfect superiority to popular adulation!

Again, when one came to him offering to follow him whithersoever he might go, he does not eagerly accept the proffered service. 'The foxes have holes,' he replies, 'and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.' He perceived that this ready professor expected temporal advantage, and he undeceived him at the outset. He checks his ardour by reminding him that he has nothing to give.

And no doubt the man went away chagrined and disappointed.

At another time a young man ran to Jesus, and kneeling before him asked, 'Good master! what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' How exceedingly prepossessing must have been the appearance of this young man, which made an impression upon Jesus so strong and evident as to cause it to be remarked that 'Jesus loved him!' But not the winning openness of the young man's countenance, not his posture of reverence, not his respectful address, could dim the bright spiritual vision, or sway the unerring heart of Jesus. His reply is, 'Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, God.' These words we commonly hear read as if they were uttered with some degree of sternness. But, bearing in mind the strong favourable impression made upon Jesus by the young man, I cannot help thinking that they must have been spoken in a tone somewhat deprecatory. It seems as if the delicate sensibility of Jesus apprehended some moral danger in being called good by one, who himself appeared so good and amiable, and whose voice was no doubt modulated by the sweetness and ingenuousness which his whole appearance exhibited so attractively. And observe, he does not instantly bid the young man come and enrol himself among his followers. He simply tells him to go and obey the commandments. He does not say, 'you cannot inherit eternal life unless you immediately and publicly profess yourself a follower of mine,' but, 'keep the commandments.' The applicant says in return, 'I have kept them from my youth, what lack I yet?' Then says Jesus, '*If thou wilt be perfect*, go, sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and come and follow me.' This requisition may seem severe and exaggerated, but it is in natural

keeping with the circumstances. They who became fellow labourers with Jesus, exposed themselves to the certain loss of property and life. Hence arose an obvious necessity for the young man's disposing of his possessions before he became an adherent of Jesus, if he were so inclined. Besides, the great Reformer wanted men, not their wealth. The prospect of gaining a rich and youthful partisan made no impression on him, neither did it prompt him to abate one jot of his demands. How singular in Jesus is the alliance of an interest in the cause of truth so strong, that he cheerfully yielded up his life for its sake, with an entire freedom from all undue anxiety about the number of his personal followers! It was upon the departure of the rich young man, who was unable to follow the self-denying directions of Jesus, that the latter broke forth (how naturally!) with that exclamation, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" How peculiarly must this conviction have been impressed upon him, when he saw one like the young ruler, so amiable and well disposed, to all appearances so unexceptionable, incapacitated by the influence of wealth to enter into the service of that divine kingdom whose cause required the greatest self-sacrifices!

Once and again, those whom Jesus had relieved from some distressing infirmity by his extraordinary power, would gladly have attached themselves to him, and gone about sounding his fame, but he desired no such heralds. He bade them go home and tell their friends what had been done for them. He directed those who came to him, to obey the Law. If this were done, he had no fear that his pretensions would not be appreciated. With a uniform liberality and wisdom, he distinctly and cheerfully appealed to the good and the

true. 'If any man will do the will of my Father, so far as it has been signified to him, he shall know of my teaching, whether it be true and from God, or whether I speak of myself.' "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice."

The passages which I have just quoted are interesting for the light they throw upon the quality of the faith of Jesus. He virtually appealed to the judgment of all good men to decide the truth of his teaching. He does not address and bribe the passions. He does not seek to intimidate. There is nothing overbearing in his tone. The doer of God's will—to him he speaks. *He*, he says, will discriminate—*he* will know whether he spake truly. I know not how this mode of proceeding may strike others, but to my mind it is peculiarly original, magnanimous and calm. It satisfies me perfectly that the faith which Jesus had in his own authority, and in the truth of his teaching, was a true, genuine faith, and no delusion. Had he been carried away by a blind enthusiasm, he would have been impatient and peremptory. There would have been a feverish anxiety to produce conviction. But we witness nothing of this kind. All is composed and serene, and he quietly awaits the judgment of all good men, never hasting, never resting.

As a general remark it is undoubtedly true, that the truth of any statement is not established merely because its author is proved to believe it. He may deceive himself. But if his faith bears all the tokens of a true and healthy faith, of being based upon true grounds, if there is nothing narrow, incoherent, hasty, or exaggerated in it, then, though we see not the foundations upon which it rests, yet we know that it is not an air-castle, but a true temple not built with hands, whose builder and supporter is God. Such, it seems to

me, was the faith of Jesus. And for my part I freely say that, even were all other evidence wanting, I should believe Christianity to be of divine origin simply because its author believed it, and feel that I stood upon no doubtful ground. His faith shows itself in every feature to be a true faith, the offspring, not of the imagination, but of living truth. It was no hallucination of mind, but true conviction.*

“If any man come to me,” said he, “and hate not his father and his mother, he is not worthy of me.” This passage, I know, has been the cause of some cavil. It furnishes powerful evidence in favour of the New Testament as an honest narrative. If Jesus Christ did not actually utter these words; if the historians had been eager to embellish their accounts of him; had they had any object but to tell the truth, they would hardly have thought of putting such language into his mouth. That he uttered it, I cannot but believe; and it must satisfy the intelligent and candid to consider that it is a strong oriental expression of an impressive truth, namely, that no one was worthy to co-operate with Jesus in the arduous work of regenerating the world, who was unable to rise above the strongest ties of nature and affection. He who could not surrender father and mother, and all earthly friends, for truth’s sake, was unfit to be its advocate and servant. Thus fully and faithfully did the Founder of Christianity depict to those around him the perilous nature of his service. He represented all the trials that awaited his adherents, in the strongest light. He manifested no concern to collect a party and build up a sect. “Not every one,” said he, “who saith unto me ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall be admitted into my kingdom, but

* See Chap. viii. p. 290—292.

those only who do the will of God." His practice, as we have seen, conformed with this declaration. And, though longing intensely for human sympathy, and full of those affections which yearn after human fellowship—affections not superseded or overlaid, but invigorated by high communion with the Father of Spirits—and regarding man with a more than brotherly interest, yet not every one does he seek for a friend and follower. The few who attended him deserve not the name of a party. They were to him more like a family circle, bound to him by no oath of allegiance, but by the informal, natural bond of reverence and affection. As to the highest and dearest purposes of his soul, he lived and died a solitary being. No one understood him. As he himself said, he came not to be ministered unto, but to minister,—not to be magnified and worshipped as a master, but to labour and bleed as a faithful and unwearied servant.

I have already referred to the passage which records the utterance of a voice from heaven, as an illustration of the perfect honesty of the narrators. But how strikingly was the greatness of his mind shown on that occasion! Whether it were an articulate voice that was heard, or, as was said by the people that stood by, only thunder, natural enough would it have been, had Jesus taken advantage of so remarkable an occurrence to magnify himself, and increase his own influence. But with that disposition to put himself aside, which was one of his most original characteristics, he instantly declared, "This voice came not for me, but for your sakes." The circumstance is related with such unconscious honesty; it is identified with so fine an illustration of the moral greatness of Jesus, that it is impossible to doubt that something extraordinary did

actually occur. Which it was, a supernatural voice, or a peal of thunder, I do not pretend to say with decision. If only the latter, it would be sufficiently startling, occurring at the moment it did, and in an age when thunder and lightning were among the most mysterious phenomena of nature. Still that this is the record of a fact, the whole structure of the passage shows. Were it a mere fiction, it is impossible to conceive how a writer, so much under the influence of a love of the marvellous as to think of exalting Jesus by fabricating a miraculous circumstance, could ever have dreamed of putting into his mouth such an interpretation of the event.

His intercourse with his disciples illustrates his personal qualities, the tenderness and strength of his affection, in a manner, true to moral beauty far beyond my power to describe it. His communion with that little circle is a perfect model of faithful love. He dealt not in eloquent protestations of regard. We observe no sentimentality, no ostentatious condescension, none of the cant of friendship; only as his life drew to its close, his affection for his friends breaks forth with peculiar tenderness. His peace he gave them but not as the world giveth.

He compared himself and his chosen disciples to a vine and its branches. This similitude we are accustomed to characterise as bold and oriental. But as we dwell upon its meaning, the boldness of the metaphor vanishes, and we perceive that it does but imperfectly express what Jesus designed to say. When you look upon a vine or a tree pushing forth its thousand branches, adorned with foliage and laden with fruit, you see only an inadequate representation of that unity of spirit, which may subsist between human beings.

and which did subsist between Jesus and his friends. What life did they draw from him! Before they became acquainted with him, they were obscure individuals, labouring every day at the humblest employments, confined to a narrow sphere. The world knew nothing of them, and they, nothing of the world, dwellers upon the shores of an inland sea. But there came One from Nazareth, into whose countenance as they looked, to whose voice as they listened, their spirits began to burn within them. They left their boats, and followed him. At every step of the way, their hearts were knit more and more closely to his, and the living truth which fed his existence and made him the godlike being that he was, was gradually infused into the bosoms of these poor fishermen. He captivated their imaginations. He entered into their very hearts and was enthroned there. The thought of him became the soul of their life. He dwelt in them. As he thus abode in them, so they abode in him. He received them into himself. By the force of love, more powerful than the embracing arms of an angel, he took them to his bosom, and there they were cherished among the most sacred objects of his being. How patiently did he bear with their narrowness! What pains did he take to enlighten and enlarge their views! With what terms of endearment did he address those simple-minded men, calling them his friends, his children, occasionally reproving them, but never breathing a word of contempt!

We divide ourselves into classes. We acknowledge distinctions of place and education. We can accord our sympathy only to such as we consider constituted like ourselves, possessed of a similar amount of information. We are prone to shut ourselves up, as if there were few or none capable of any communion with us.

How humbling the contrast between the great Master and his modern disciples! Vast was the distinction between him and that lowly circle that surrounded him. They were ignorant. He was inspired with the profoundest wisdom. Their imaginations were carried away by the fading glories of the world. He looked at things invisible, heavenly, everlasting. Yet wide as was the difference between him and them, he loved them still, and took the heartiest interest in their society. They could afford him no comfort proportionate to his need, still he evidently was comforted by their simple devotion; and their presence soothed the burthened heart of the Man of sorrows.

And what strength did they, in their turn, draw from him! As the branches derive nourishment from the parent vine, so they became new men, rich in immortal fruit. Once humble labourers, interested only in the daily successes of a mean occupation, knowing and caring nothing about the fortunes of the great world, they are transformed into the servants of their race. The lake of Galilee is forsaken and the world becomes their sphere and men are the objects of their toils. Affections, of which they dreamed not, awake within them; and they hunger so for a world's welfare that they are ready to sacrifice every thing for it, the good opinion of men, the favour of the great, the protection of magistrates, and life itself. An unconquerable energy is infused into their whole being, and they become conspicuous in achieving the greatest revolution the world has ever known, a revolution which prostrated thousands of altars and thrones, and reared vast empires on their ruins; and now the names of those first disciples have become household words upon the lips of nations. Their Master assured them they should sit upon twelve thrones and be as twelve judges in Israel. The pro-

mise has been more than fulfilled. In the place they now hold among men, they are far more illustrious than the occupants of the proudest thrones on earth. This wondrous transformation in the fishermen of Galilee, was wrought by the personal influence of Jesus. Through the love he evinced and inspired, new and plenteous communications of life and light were made. He strengthened their hearts and hands. He was the vine of which they were the branches, the body of which they were the vigorous members. In the most vital sense of the word, he dwelt with them and in them, even when he was no longer personally present. Suffering became honourable in their eyes because it brought them into closer union with him, the great Sufferer, and they gloried in showing their affection for him even by tears and blood.

Such was the power of Jesus as a friend. Such was his influence upon those who enjoyed his personal regard. But the most touching manifestations of his spirit in relation to his disciples appear in the last hours which he passed with them just before his death. He, who of all men most needed to be comforted then, undertakes the office of consoler. The Evangelist John, in recording so fully the various considerations by which Jesus sought to sustain the sinking minds of his followers, has proved his claim to the title of the beloved disciple, and shown the congeniality of his spirit with the spirit of his master. Well do the sons and daughters of affliction turn always first to the fourteenth chapter of John. What a fountain of consolation flows for ever there! We may judge how utterly cast down, the disciples of Jesus were at that moment, by the pains he takes to moderate their sorrow. He suggests every possible topic of comfort. 'Be not distressed,' he says, 'rely upon God. Rely upon me.' By their best

hopes, by the expectation of beholding him again, by their regard for him—('If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I go unto my Father. My Father is greater than I,') and for their own true comfort, he bids them be of good cheer. For their sake, he assures them that it is necessary he should depart. 'If I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you.' He promises them that, after his departure, they shall have that which shall supply his place, another guide, another comforter, the Spirit of Truth, or in other words, a true spirit, a true mind, a state of feeling which being in accordance with truth, enabling them to see things as they are and in no false light, would afford them guidance and consolation, and be to them what he had been, an instructor and friend. His personal presence was an obstacle to the enlargement of their views. For, so long as he was with them, despite all that he could do or say, they clung to the idea of a worldly empire. Their hearts were set upon his assuming a princely state. They needed more potent instructions than could be conveyed by mortal lips, even though they were the lips of Him who spake as never man spake. There is no teaching like the teaching of events. These are the language of God. Hence the words of Jesus were of themselves insufficient thoroughly to enlighten his disciples. The facts of his life, death and resurrection were necessary, and they wrought with power upon his personal friends, unsealing their mental vision, and leading them to defer more and more unreservedly to his authority. With what perfect truth, then, did he say, 'It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you.' How much truer became the spirit of their minds! What comfort had they in these better views! Gratefully must they have confessed

that the promise of their master was fulfilled. Another comforter came and took up his abode in their hearts.

Reader! you are a member of an affectionate circle. There is one to whom the rest of the little band look with fondest hopes, a parent or a child. He is in no feeble sense your life. The idea of losing him you cannot entertain. What would become of you? How could you live and what should you live for, if that idol were taken from you? The sun may go down at noon. The earth may be shaken out of its place, but if that life is touched, chaos would come to you, and existence be without form and void. To you that precious friend is scarcely less than Jesus was to his disciples, the centre of your hopes, the spring of your life. But suddenly that light is quenched. The rock on which you rest vanishes. And for you, it is as if a great voice, like that heard by the Roman when he burst into the burning temple at Jerusalem, had sounded through the vast temple of nature, saying, "Let us depart," and creation were forsaken of its God. And yet with what truth might your departing friend take up the words, 'It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away the comforter will not come.' How little have we of a true spirit while we are clinging idolatrously to a being, frail like ourselves! We are living in the light of a human countenance, on which the ghastliness of death may pass at any moment, when we were made to live in the cloudless light of eternal truth. It is necessary for us that those, who are to us as gods, should go away. For while they remain and we lavish on them all our affections, the true comforter cannot come. There is no place for him here.—But to return.

The conduct of Jesus towards the disciple who betrayed him, the disciple who denied him, and the ma-

gistrate who, against his own convictions, condemned him to death, is marked by the tenderness and generosity of mind by which he was ever so distinguished.

Whether Jesus was perfectly acquainted with the character and destiny of Judas in the first instance, may admit of a doubt. I cannot believe, as it sometimes seems to be supposed, that this wretched man was chosen as a disciple for the express purpose of doing what he did. I should prefer to conjecture, in the absence of direct testimony, that Jesus cherished the hope of exerting a beneficial influence upon Judas. One thing, however, is clear, that he, who knew what was in man, could not long have remained ignorant of the besetting sin of his traitorous adherent. His crime, great as it was, was not unaccountable. That he was not devoid of sensibility, his awful fate, revealing the poignancy of his remorse, proves plainly. It was the common vice of avarice that was his ruin. And it was probably by expectations awakened by the love of money, that he was induced to adhere to Jesus. He was exasperated, because this low craving, so far from being gratified, was continually rebuked by the words and spirit of his Master. The waste of that costly ointment, which was poured upon the person of Jesus by Mary, appears to have been the immediate cause of that treacherous bargain which he made with the Priests. Possibly he flattered himself that, if Jesus were really the Messiah, he would suffer no harm, and if he were not, then it would be an honourable service to deliver him over to punishment and death. But we are interested now in observing how he was treated by him whom he used so basely.

At the Last Supper, as recorded in the thirteenth chapter of John, the feelings of Jesus towards the traitor are incidentally and most touchingly disclosed.

That the confidence which his disciples cherished in him might not be shaken; that they might, after his death, know that nothing had befallen him for which he had not been prepared, he deems it right and necessary to tell them, what then certainly he had perfect knowledge of, namely, that one of them would deliver him into the power of his enemies. At that moment, his popularity was so great that the Priests did not dare to attempt to seize him in public. They gladly availed themselves of the assistance of one of his followers, who knew the places to which he was accustomed to retire. Of the plot which had been laid Jesus was fully aware through his extraordinary knowledge; and, as I have just said, he makes known his acquaintance with it to his disciples, that they may afterwards perceive that he was not taken by surprise. "Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may (continue to) believe that I am he."* But he communicates to them no more than was barely necessary to produce this effect. He does not taunt Judas. He takes no pleasure in showing that he was aware of his treachery. On the contrary, he approaches the subject with most evident reluctance. He alludes to it twice very obscurely, once when he was washing the feet of his disciples, when he said, "And ye are clean, but not all," and again, a few moments afterwards, observing, "I speak not of you all. I know those I have chosen." And at last, when he explicitly declares that one of them would betray him, saying outright, "One of you shall betray me," he is "troubled in spirit," agitated, distressed. When they severally exclaim, in answer to this last observation, "Is it I? Is it I?" he answers not; only to his favourite disciple John, who, in ac-

* He told them what was about to take place, not so much to produce faith as to confirm it—to preserve it from being shaken.

cordance with the reclining posture in which it was customary then to sit at table, leaned on the bosom of Jesus, does he designate the individual to whom he referred. Even to John it appears that he must have spoken in a whisper, for none of the rest heard him. And to John he did not breathe the name of Judas. It would seem that he knew he was watched, by Peter especially, who had beckoned to John to ask to whom Jesus alluded. He therefore adopts a sign, and directs John to observe to whom he was just about to give the morsel which he had dipped into the dish. He knew the excitable nature of Peter and the rest, and he avoided stirring up their wrath against the traitor. When Judas, stung with mortification and rage, left the place, Jesus did not take the opportunity of his departure, to disclose the name and purpose of the traitor, but he shows the elevation of his mind by that burst of mingled sublimity and pathos, to which the Scriptures themselves scarcely afford a parallel. He seems instantly to forget the treacherous disciple. The departing steps of Judas, going to consummate his base purpose, sound in his ears like the approaching steps of his own fate. The end was now beginning. His death he felt was then close at hand, but as it drew nigh, it shone with a celestial glory. "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him." From the contemplation of the glory that awaited him in that sublime, self-sacrificing death of the Cross, he turns to his disciples with words of melting tenderness, "My children!"* says he, "in a little while I must leave you, and, as I said to the Jews, I now say to you,

* In the Common Version it is, "Little children," which is a literal, but not the true translation. The word in the original is evidently a term of endearment, and should be rendered by a term of corresponding import. When moved by tenderness towards one or a number of our friends, we say, "My child!" or, "My children!" not "Little child," or, "Little children."

whither I go ye cannot come. A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another : as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." With what exquisite truth did he, under the circumstances, call this a new commandment ! The thought of his death, brought vividly home to him by the departure of Judas, brings along with it the thought that he was about to be separated from his friends, and instantly his heart overflows with tenderness. It seems as if at that moment the strength of his affection for them was laid bare to his own eyes. So deep was the love of which he was then conscious, that it seemed to him like a new feeling, and as if he had never before commanded his disciples to love one another. In order to perceive the fine working of nature revealed in that phrase 'a new commandment,' the reader has only to reflect, how often in his own experience, the most familiar thoughts, the strongest affections, have been suddenly brought over him with such force, that they seemed altogether new.

I beg the reader to study again and again this most remarkable chapter, the thirteenth of John. The writer shows himself utterly unconscious of any design but to state, with all directness and brevity, what took place on the occasion specified. He stops to make only one or two brief comments. He says nothing of the extraordinary moral beauty which he depicts. And yet every thing is in the profoundest harmony with the greatness and tenderness of the character of Jesus. If all the rest of the history were pronounced false and fabulous, here, on this portion of it, we discern the deepest impress of life and Nature. How wonderfully natural that remark of John's—"After the sop Satan entered into him." John knew not until that moment

the traitorous design of Judas, whose whole appearance and expression, even if he did not betray his malignant passions in his features, must have been instantaneously changed in the eyes of John. John then saw the demon in his countenance, and in perfect accordance with nature, says, that after Judas had received the morsel from Jesus, Satan entered into him.

We perceive the same nobleness of mind in the bearing of Jesus towards Peter. Jesus was apprehended at night in the garden, and carried thence to the house of the Jewish High Priest. There, after a hurried examination and a pretence of judgment, the High Council of the nation declared him worthy of death. The Council then broke up, leaving Jesus in the hall of the High Priest's house, in the custody of an unfeeling crowd, who immediately began to offer every indignity to his person, spitting upon him, blindfolding him and then striking him suddenly with the palms of their hands, and in mockery bidding him use his extraordinary knowledge and tell which it was that smote him. It pains us to refer to these details,—to think of Jesus of Nazareth, that generous and exalted being, subjected to this brutal treatment. While these things were going on, Peter, who had had the courage to follow his master to the High Priest's house, was accosted by some one, who said 'Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.' Peter probably had supposed that his master might not receive any injury. Unprepared for what was now taking place, and alarmed at the violence which was used towards Jesus, his courage suddenly dies away, and in his terror he is driven to declare to the woman who had expressed her suspicions of him, that he knew not what she meant. Finding himself

suspected, he endeavours, as we may surmise from Matthew's narrative, to leave the place.* This movement awakened suspicion anew. Again it was said, 'Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth.' Still more terrified by the repetition of the accusation, he declared with the solemnity of an oath "I know not the man." Finding that in attempting to leave the hall he had exposed himself to suspicion, he seems to have returned and stood or sate by the fire which had just been kindled. But he could not escape observation. Some of them that stood by turned to him, and said, "Surely thou art also of them, for thy speech betrayeth thee." It is probable that, in his agitation, the wretched disciple said much more than is recorded, and by the peculiarity of his dialect showed himself to be a Galilean. 'Then he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man.' The language of the original implies that his curses were pronounced, not upon his accusers, but upon himself, as if he had said 'May I perish if I know any thing about this man. God is my witness, I am not this man's friend. I know him not.'

While Peter was uttering these asseverations, his master was suffering the greatest indignities. The cruel hands of those ruffians were raining blows upon him, accompanied by every species of insult. In the midst of this violence, his ear caught the sound of a familiar voice, pouring forth oaths and curses. It was Peter, the affectionate, forward, boastful Peter, who, in this violent manner and in the presence of that brutal company, was denying all knowledge of Jesus. Judging from his recent professions, we should expect that, at the first blush of insult offered to his master, he would

* See Matth. xxvi. 71. According to this account, the second time Peter was charged with being a follower of Jesus occurred *when he was gone out into the porch.*

have sprung forward, and defended him at the hazard of his life. But this he did not do. He swore solemnly, and repeatedly, that he knew not Jesus, and was no friend of his. Had not his generous master known him better than he knew himself, this cowardly and faithless conduct of a friend must have been a severer blow to him, than any inflicted by his unfeeling tormentors. But he was prepared for it. He knew the weakness of Peter. He uttered no exclamation of surprise, no reproach at his faithlessness. This was a time to try the character of Jesus. Had he been any other than the perfectly magnanimous being that he was, he would naturally have contradicted the shameless falsehoods of Peter. He would have sought to avert the blows of the cruel men around him, by pointing out to them another, and a worthy object of their mockery. But so far was he above every thing of this kind, so far above all selfishness and anger, that he merely turned and looked at Peter. Those eyes, through which beamed the most generous spirit that ever dwelt in a human bosom, were turned full in all their awful clearness and serenity upon the apostate disciple, and they dissolved his heart in the tears of an agonising repentance. No word was spoken, for Jesus thought not to implicate others in his sufferings, no, not even one who at that moment seemed so richly to deserve to suffer. Who can be insensible to the magnanimity here exhibited ! To adopt the eloquent remark of a most eloquent writer,—“ When Peter had denied him thrice, the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter, and Peter went out and wept bitterly. If that look taught Peter to repent, it may teach us to believe : the fraud and the folly, which we witness, have no such singleness of heart, and such plain majesty of action. Wherever we behold such signs as these, we hail them

as the marks which God has put upon truth and good faith; premeditated sophistry may destroy the first burst of nature, but in reading the history of Christ's death, the fresh and sudden feelings of the heart all acquit him, all praise him, all believe in him;—we all feel as Pontius Pilate his judge felt, who, when he had looked at him, and heard him speak, broke from the judgment seat, and bathed his trembling hands in the water, saying, "I call upon you all to witness, I am guiltless of the blood of this innocent man."*

What a strong and cheering light does the character of Jesus, as revealed in his treatment of Peter, cast upon the character of God! It may not be denied that the Deity is frequently represented as a stern and repulsive being. But would we know how God regards the sinful, we must turn to Jesus Christ. He declares himself *one* with the Father. Would we learn what the Supreme Spirit is, we must study the spirit of Christ; for they are one. They who believe that this oneness is literal and personal, must feel the whole force of this argument. For the Supreme is unchangeable. And if Christ was full of consideration, then surely this must be the character of God, and we may well believe that every allowance is made for us, by him who knows our frame, and remembers we are dust. If any conduct justifies indignation, it is such conduct as Peter's. But how did Jesus treat the faithless Apostle? He only turned and looked upon him! looked upon him no doubt with undiminished affection, and with a countenance beaming with pity. Here then, in the hall of the High Priest's palace, and amidst that dark and brutal throng, streams forth a sublime revelation of the unutterable mercy of God, who 'hath

* See Sydney Smith's Sermons, vol. i. p. 178. Sermon "On Good Friday."

shone into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God **IN THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST.** In that look which was turned upon Peter, there is a beam that, issuing from the Spirit of all light and love, illuminates the upturned features of Penitence, and directs her to God as to one, of whose mercy a father's affection, and a mother's fondness, are but dim and imperfect types !

The conduct of Jesus, when he stood before the Roman Governor, is marked by the same elevation, which we have observed in so many instances. He betrayed not the slightest symptom of fear, or of any emotion inconsistent with his usual dignity of mind and manner. He calmly declared that his kingdom was not of an outward, political character ; if it had been, he would have had adherents to fight for him. But as he had used no violence, it was evident enough he had not sought worldly power. " Art thou a king then ?" asked Pilate. " Yes," is the reply, " I am a king. For this end was I born, for this cause came I into the world, to bear witness to the truth ; and every true man is my subject." Such was his sublime definition of his regal character. After Pilate had put him to the torture of the scourge, with the probable hope, as I have already intimated, that this might satisfy the Jews, it became evident to Jesus that Pilate was too weak to save him, and of course that words were of no avail. And when Pilate began again to question him, repeating the same inquiries, he made no answer. The Governor then menaced him with his power. How justly does Jesus appear to have estimated the character of Pilate ! He neither weakly defers to the imbecile magistrate, nor does he utter one upbraiding word ; he simply observes that Pilate had no power of his own ; that he was but an

instrument, and that the principal guilt of the transaction rested with others. The injustice with which he was treated disturbed not, for a moment, the clearness and calmness of his mind. It neither intimidated, nor exasperated him.

It cannot be that we have hearts, and that they are to remain cold and insensible to all these various and touching manifestations of the mingled tenderness and wisdom of the man of Nazareth. Who can help feeling that he must come hither—to this, the heavenliest model of all virtue, to kindle his best sentiments, to elevate and refine his sense of truth and rectitude, to feel his imperishable soul? Who so high in rank, so gifted in intellect, as to refuse to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Master? In all that elevates human nature, he *is* the master of us all. There is nothing humiliating—oh no—it must be our delight and honour—it must all-ennoble us to accord him this title. The words of the fervent old poet—have they now no music in our ears?

“How sweetly doth MY MASTER sound! MY MASTER!
 As ambergris leaves a rich scent
 Unto the taster:
 So do these words a sweet content,
 An oriental fragrancY: MY MASTER!”

The instances I have adduced in this chapter to illustrate the moral greatness of Jesus Christ, I have arranged with very little order. I knew not how to do otherwise, or better, or where to begin. And I know not now where to end. There are numerous other occasions upon which the wonderful beauty of his moral being is disclosed. I must break off with the hope that the illustrations of this great subject, which

have been specified, have been stated at least with some distinctness and discrimination, not altogether from hearsay, but with some personal feeling of their truth. If this hope be not justifiable, it would be in vain to say more. But if I have been at all successful in what I have attempted, then enough has been said to show how abundant are the materials which the Christian Records have furnished us, whereby we may construct in our minds an idea of moral greatness, to which history affords no equal. Not a trace appears in these writings of any design to work out the uniform consistency, apparent in this respect. The writers appear to be occupied with nothing but a statement of facts; of facts which, however, they do not enlarge upon, nor make the least effort to combine into a whole. They pass abruptly from one incident to another, entirely different in its details, unconscious of the beautiful and godlike spirit which they portray. Not that they were insensible to the power of the character of him, whose words and works they relate. They could not possibly have given stronger proof of their being thoroughly imbued with the spirit of Jesus, which was the spirit of truth, than they have given in their simple, unvarnished narrations.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CRUCIFIXION.

"Auctor nominis ejus Christus, qui, Tiberio imperitante, per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio affectus erat." TAQITUS ANN. lib. xv.

The leader of this denomination was Christ, who, in the reign of Tiberius, suffered punishment under the Procurator Pontius Pilate. *Trans.*

THE marks of truth and nature upon the accounts of the death of Jesus and his rising from the dead are very numerous and impressive. They are precisely such relations of these most interesting events as we might naturally expect, supposing them to be true. The whole style of narration, the discrepancies between the different accounts, the very errors and mistakes apparent in some subordinate particulars, all indicate precisely such a state of feeling as must have been produced in the eye and ear-witnesses, if the things related actually took place. It is in this perfect truth of feeling, so abundantly disclosed, that I find an impregnable ground for my faith. The testimony of one man, giving indubitable tokens of a true spirit, is absolutely decisive in itself, admitting of no comparison with the testimony of men in whom no such spirit is discernible, even though they were numberless. It is not

therefore upon the number of the witnesses in the present case that I rely, but upon the overwhelming evidence given that these histories are the productions of truth and honesty. It is true, we are extremely liable to be deceived as to the indications of the presence of a true mind in any given instance. But what does this prove? Not surely that there is no such thing as a true mind, but that truth of feeling is so powerful to impress and convince, that the slightest appearance of it carries with it the greatest weight.

Shortly after Judas quitted the presence of Jesus at the Last Supper, Jesus himself, accompanied by the eleven, left that 'large upper room' and went to the garden of Gethsemane. It was probably in his way thither that he uttered what is recorded in the 15th chapter of John, and that the vineyards through which he passed suggested the language, "I am the true vine, &c." When he reached the spot, bidding his disciples remain where they were and taking with him only Peter, James, and John, he retired into the shades of the garden. Then came that hour of mental agony of which I have already spoken. Leaving his three friends, he went to a short distance and threw himself on the ground, in the greatest distress of mind. But his anguish could not extinguish his generosity. For, although, upon returning to Peter and his two companions, he found them asleep and awoke them with the reproachful words, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" yet he appears immediately to suggest an excuse for their unseasonable slumbers, "The spirit truly is willing but the flesh is weak." "Watch and pray," said he, "lest ye enter into temptation." What volumes were contained in this brief injunction, uttered at that moment, when he was himself so sorely tempted, so

peculiarly impressed with the need of watchfulness and prayer, and when he saw how ignorant his friends were of the fearful trials to which they were shortly to be summoned ! As the struggle of his spirit was passing away, he perceived the approach of the persons who, with Judas for their guide, were coming to seize him, and immediately he roused his three disciples and went to meet the armed band. The traitor hurried forward and, in order to point out to the officers the individual whom they were to apprehend, saluted Jesus with a kiss. "Friend," said Jesus, "wherefore art thou come ? Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss !" The mildness and perfect self-possession of this address, conjoined with the knowledge which it showed of the design of Judas, pierced the traitor to the soul, and we see him plunging, in all the horror of remorse, into the shadow of the night. With the self-possession which was habitual in him and with characteristic dignity of mien, Jesus approached the persons who came to seize him and inquired whom they sought. "Jesus of Nazareth," is the reply. "I am he," said Jesus, in a tone which knew no fear, and with a majesty of manner that struck awe into the men, and they started back overpowered by his presence, so that some if not all were thrown to the ground by the violence of the motion and the confusion that was produced. But they shortly recovered themselves and again he asked, "Whom do ye seek ?" "Jesus of Nazareth." "I have told you," said he, "that I am he. If ye seek me only, let these friends of mine go their way."

The officers then took him and having bound him led him to the house of the High Priest, where a council of the Priests was assembled. The chief of the body began to question Jesus concerning his disciples and his teaching, as if he (the High Priest) knew

nothing of the case and had not fully made up his mind! 'Why,' asked the Arraigned in reply, 'why askest thou me what I have said? Ask those who have heard me. I have used no concealment. In synagogues and in the temple, in the most public places I have spoken. Call those who have heard me and let them testify.' The questioning of the High Priest was so glaringly out of place, and so plainly shown to be so by the answer of Jesus, and that dignitary was made to appear in so unworthy a light, that one of the bystanders felt as if the High Priest were insulted, and immediately struck Jesus, with the exclamation, "Answerest thou the High Priest so?" "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil, but if well, why smitest thou me?" is the mild reply.

Upon the most prominent incidents of the trial of Jesus I have had occasion already to remark. When prudence no longer required him to avoid the avowal of his Messiahship, and at the moment when such an avowal was fatal to himself, he hesitated not a moment to make it. For this the Jewish Council judged him worthy of death, and carried him before the Roman Governor. That imbecile magistrate made a few struggles to save the prisoner, but was overborne by the clamours and menaces of those whom nothing but the blood of Jesus would satisfy, and orders were given for his crucifixion. As none but the lowest criminals suffered this punishment, the Roman soldiers considered Jesus a fit subject for mockery, and when they grew tired of the savage sport, they led him forth, fainting under the cross which he was compelled, according to custom, to carry. In the crowd that surrounded and followed him to the place of execution, many hearts no doubt bled, but dared not to plead for him, looking on "in weak disapproval, acknowledging only that it was

Necessity.” Women pressed through the throng and gazed with streaming eyes upon that Holy Sufferer, who had healed their sick and blessed their children. “Daughters of Jerusalem!” said he, “weep not for me. Weep for yourselves and for your children, for the days are coming when it will be said, Happy the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave nourishment!”

Jesus was tried and executed on the day preceding the Jewish Sabbath, of course on a Friday. Respecting the precise hour of his crucifixion the accounts vary.* Various methods of reconciling the statements of Mark and John have been attempted, but it seems to me scarcely necessary. It would be very strange, and not at all natural, if the power of noting the lapse of time had not been disturbed in the minds of the spectators and participants in the scene, while events were taking place so intensely interesting.

From the time Jesus was nailed to the cross until he expired, it appears from the different accounts that he spoke seven times. We are not able to determine with certainty the precise order in which the various sentences and ejaculations ascribed to him were uttered. The following however appears to me their most probable sequence. As they were nailing him to the cross, or just as that terrible office was completed, he breathed forth that sublime prayer upon which I remarked in the foregoing chapter, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’ After he was crucified, they immediately began to jeer and ridicule him. And then it was that the brief conversation passed between him and one of his fellow-sufferers. ‘This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise’—in other

* See Mark xv. 25, and John xix. 14.

words, 'thou shalt immediately be with me in the condition of the virtuous dead.' The individual to whom these words were addressed, in his ready appreciation of the character of Jesus, whose meek and touching demeanour he had observed, in rebuking the other criminal who had joined with the crowd in ridiculing Jesus, how impressively did he show that he was already, spiritually speaking, on the very threshold of Heaven! Already was he in Paradise. Shortly afterwards, Jesus, recognising among the multitude his mother and his favourite friend John, signified his wish that she should regard John as her son in his place, and that John should consider her as his mother. The thirst naturally attendant upon the intense agony which he was enduring soon became so severe that he could not help giving expression to his feelings. He exclaimed 'I thirst,' and one of the crowd brought, fastened upon the end of a reed, a piece of sponge which had been dipped into a mixture of vinegar and myrrh, a preparation used on such occasions, out of mercy to the crucified, to stupify and deaden their sensibilities. A portion of this mixture was offered to Jesus, just before he was crucified, and he refused to drink it. He would not avail himself of any such means of escaping the torture that awaited him. Just before the sponge was lifted to his lips, his sufferings were so severe that for a moment he seemed to be overwhelmed with a feeling of desperation, which burst forth in the words, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!' For an instant his agony was intolerable. Still even his momentary despair is expressed in the devout language of Scripture. These words are the commencement of one of the Psalms. The sharp paroxysm of pain appears to have been soon succeeded by a feeling of relief, and life began rapidly to ebb away. At this

moment he exclaimed, 'It is finished,' or 'it is over.' This exclamation is sometimes interpreted in too formal a manner, as if Jesus referred to the completion of his great mission, whereas it is more natural and simple to suppose that he alluded to the excruciating pain he had just suffered. His last words were, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.' With this expression of filial trust, his head fell and he expired.

Thus died the man of Nazareth, not with stoical insensibility, but with natural indications of the extremest suffering. Who does not prize his expressions of forgiveness, filial affection, and piety, more deeply, as bursting from a heart palpitating and almost broken with mortal agonies, than if he had maintained a stony indifference, or exhibited the demeanour of one steeled by a peculiar temperament or a stern purpose against the betrayal of the least sign of suffering? In the latter case we could not have had a manifestation of character at once so elevated, and yet so perfectly natural. We could hardly have avoided the impression of something forced and artificial. It would have seemed as if he were actuated by some sentiment of human honour, or some desire to triumph over his tormentors, and baffle their malice. He did triumph over them gloriously. But then his victory was the more complete, his glory the more signal, on this very account, even because he never struggled for victory over men, never sought the faintest shadow of human glory. He was influenced by no narrow reference to human standards of thought and judgment. He felt and spoke and acted under no constraint. To every deep feeling of his heart, he gave free expression. When he suffered, he showed that he suffered. And though his whole soul is laid bare, and we see that his agony was

extreme, we discover no trace of fear. His emotions were natural, but never unworthy of him, and his predominant feelings were of the most generous and exalted character. For my own part, I could more easily doubt the plainest evidence of my senses, than the reality of the scene which I have now briefly reviewed, and from which I gather so vivid and consistent an impression of the most perfect beauty and the most perfect nature, without any design apparent on the part of the historian to produce this impression.

Jesus breathed his last very soon, in a few hours after he was fastened to the cross. It was not unusual for persons in that horrible situation to survive for days. It was natural therefore, that Pilate should be surprised at the speedy termination of the sufferings of Jesus. But when we consider all the probable circumstances of the case, it can hardly surprise us that the vital principle was so soon extinguished. I cannot but believe that there was the greatest physical difference between Jesus and those who usually suffered death by crucifixion. The latter were generally men of the lowest description, of a coarse, rugged temperament; while with the thought of Jesus is naturally associated in the mind the idea of an almost feminine susceptibility. As I have more than once had occasion to observe, the whole tenour of Christianity intimates as much. But the acuteness of his sensibility to pain is explicitly shown in the accounts of his death. How fearful and overpowering were his agonies, that cry of his, "my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" proves very clearly. The generous affection, the filial love particularly, to which he gave expression on the Cross, reveals the depth of his sensibilities. I beg to observe by the way, that the full beauty of the incident to

which I now allude, the manifestation of his concern for his mother, does not appear to have been perceived. In our version, the passage runs thus: "When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, behold thy mother!" But the slightest glance at the original shows that the words of Jesus were, "Woman! behold! thy son!" and when he spoke to John, "Behold! thy mother!" The difference between the two readings is more important than it may at first seem. The reading of the common version presents us with a complete sentence, while in the original the utterance of Jesus appears to be broken and ejaculatory. In this case, there is a fine and touching accordance between the brief imperfect mode of expression, and the physical condition of the speaker—a condition of mortal agony. Parched with thirst, and almost in the very pains of death, he was able to utter himself only briefly, and at intervals, and to signify his affectionate wishes with regard to his mother, by a word or two, which he accompanied, possibly by a look, or an inclination of the head, or some slight movement, such as his confined and agonizing posture allowed, relying upon the quick-conceiving affections of his mother and John to make out his meaning. The noise and the crowd may have required a considerable effort of voice from Jesus, to make himself heard by his mother and John, who probably were not able to approach very near the Cross. There is an impression of deliberation and formality produced by the common and erroneous reading of this passage; which does not correspond so naturally with the circumstances. How profound must have been the sensibility of that heart, whose filial affection the distracting pangs of a most terrible death

could not quench ! It is impossible that one so constituted could have long endured such fearful sufferings.

When I consider the character of Jesus, his astonishing elevation of mind, his lofty aims, his laborious life ; when I think how successfully he sustained himself, at a point where the tremendously exciting circumstances, to which he was almost every hour exposed, could not reach him, I cannot but feel that all the energies of his physical temperament, were it of the most finely organized character, must have been tasked to the uttermost. The real ground of surprise, I am persuaded, is, not that he died so soon after being suspended upon the Cross, but that he did not expire sooner. Nay, we may almost wonder that he lived to be crucified. With a nature singularly fitted to find strength and satisfaction and happiness in this world, in human aids and supports, he lived deprived of all these. Once and again, the thought of his peculiar destiny, elevating as it usually was, seems almost to have overpowered him. The dreadful baptism, as he termed it, which he was about to go through—how did he long to have it over ! Consider too how much he had suffered, just before his crucifixion. The night before, in the garden, the agony of his mind was so exhausting, that as he himself said, it seemed to him as if he should die—as if he could not live. Recollect the brutal treatment to which he was exposed, at the house of the High Priest,—and then again at the rough and savage hands of the Roman soldiers ! He had bled, too, beneath the tortures of the Roman Scourge, an instrument of pain so severe, that ancient authors pronounce it *horrible*.* How greatly he was exhausted, the circumstance that another was seized and compelled to carry his cross for him, intimates very

* See Wakefield on Matthew, who quotes Horace, and refers to Juvenal.

probably. This would hardly have been allowed, if the appearance of Jesus, weak and fainting, had not awakened in the minds of the Roman soldiers the fear that he might die, and that so they might be disappointed of their barbarous sport.

Bearing all these things in mind, I cannot wonder that he lived upon the cross only a few hours. And I can scarcely bear, even for the purpose of confutation, to allude to the suspicion which has sometimes been expressed, that he did not actually die, but only swooned. I cannot but regard it as utterly incredible that so much agony should have resulted in any thing short of death. As the Sabbath, and it was a special religious occasion, was nigh at hand, the Jewish elders, with a characteristic scrupulousness, anxious that the festival should not be defiled by the unsightly and unclean spectacle, requested Pilate to cause the crucified to be put to death, and their bodies to be removed. In compliance with this request, the Roman Governor directed that the legs of the sufferers should be broken. This would appear to be a usual operation in such cases, and the effect of it, or of some blow by which it was accompanied, was to put a speedy termination to life. When the persons entrusted with this office came to Jesus, they found that he was already dead, and, surprised at his having expired so soon, and doubtful of the fact, a soldier pierced his side with a spear. This was undoubtedly done to make it certain that he was dead. If, as we may suppose, the soldier stood before the cross, and held his spear in his right hand, he most probably plunged the weapon into the left side, and so reached a vital part. I know not whether it is so by design, but in Rubens's celebrated picture of the Descent from the Cross, the mark of the spear is shown on the right side of Jesus. From the wound made by

the soldier there issued "blood and water."* We have in these words a Hebrew form of expression, equivalent to bloody water, or watery blood,—water more or less discoloured by blood. The heart is always surrounded by a small quantity of water, apparently designed to lubricate it, and facilitate its motion. It is said that in cases of persons who die after extreme suffering, this fluid is considerably increased in quantity.† If the history had stated simply that blood flowed from the side of Jesus, there might be some plausibility in the suspicion, either that he was not really dead, as blood does not usually flow from a dead body, or that this circumstance was fabricated for the sake of showing that Jesus was actually dead, although it would have proved no such thing. But putting out of view all anatomical considerations, it is impossible to account for the mention of "blood *and* water," (a phrase which may mean merely discoloured water,) save upon the supposition that there was actually such a discharge.

* It is worthy of note, that John accompanies the record of this circumstance with a solemn asseveration of its truth, "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true." We cannot help suspecting that the historian had reference here to a sect that appeared very early, the Docetæ, who maintained that Christ came only *in appearance*. There is, at least, a singular coincidence between the importance attached to the discharge of blood and water by the Evangelist, and the language of Gibbon, "*While the blood of Christ yet smoked on Mount Calvary*, the Docetæ invented the impious and extravagant hypothesis, that, instead of issuing from the womb of the Virgin, he had descended on the banks of the river Jordan, in the form of perfect manhood; that he had imposed on the senses of his enemies, and of his disciples; and that the ministers of Pilate had wasted their impotent rage on an airy phantom, who *seemed* to expire on the cross, and, after three days, to rise from the dead."—(The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, chapter xxi.) In more than one instance the Gospel of John appears to have reference to coteremporaneous opinions.

† "The 'liquor pericardii' is, in general, in such small quantities that its effusion is scarcely evident; but when the death is slow, and even in the case of a person who is hung, it accumulates rapidly, as well as in all the pectoral vessels, besides the pericardium."—(Michaelis on the Resurrection.)

There is no conceivable inducement for the mention of water, but its actual appearance. In this case I know not how there can linger the least doubt of the death of Jesus.

The crucifixion of Jesus was attended by certain appalling circumstances. "Now, from the sixth hour, there was darkness over all the land, unto the ninth hour.—And behold the veil of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom, and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who slept, arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city and appeared unto many."*

Whether the earthquake which is recorded to have taken place was miraculous, using the word in its popular sense, and was caused as an expression of Divine Displeasure, admits of a very serious doubt. Thus regarded, it surely does not correspond with the spirit of mercy and forgiveness which glorified the agonies of Jesus. Besides, it certainly admitted of a double interpretation; and his enemies may have understood it as a token in their favour, against him. The darkness by which it was preceded, and which came on some hours before he breathed his last, was certainly calculated, if construed as a sign from Heaven, to aggravate the gloom and horror of dying.

But however we may regard the earthquake, the fact, that there was an earthquake, appears to be most evident from the manner in which it is mentioned. If these extraordinary circumstances were fabricated, it must have been for a certain purpose; to express the horror excited by the wickedness of those who had put Jesus to death. And the writers, who entertained so

* See Matthew, xxvii. 45, 51—53.

great an abhorrence of the destroyers of Jesus as to invent such an extraordinary physical phenomenon to express their indignation, would certainly not have contented themselves with such a naked statement of the fact. They would have made some remark explanatory of the convulsion of Nature. They would have accompanied the account with some expression of their own feelings, which must have been strong indeed to lead them to imagine or to invent what did not really take place.

And besides, when the occurrence of the earthquake is admitted, all the other circumstances mentioned admit of being accounted for in a very natural manner. The rending of the veil in the temple which hung before the Holy of Holies, and which was probably worn by time, the splitting of rocks, and the opening of the graves, which, like the sepulchre in which Jesus was laid, and like the grave of Lazarus, were usually caves with stones rolled at their mouths to close them—all these may have been caused by the agitation of the earth. Now I beg the reader to pause, and picture to himself the then state of things, and he will discern an impressive manifestation of truth and nature in this portion of the history. The individual who had just expired on the cross, had every where produced the greatest sensation. The deep interest which the leading men of the nation had taken in putting him to death, proves that he could have been no common person. Every where the people had flocked round him in multitudes, and he was very generally regarded as a Prophet. His benignity, his wisdom, his unwonted air of authority, his extraordinary powers, had moved the public mind deeply. And now that he had just breathed his last upon the cruel cross, darkness had overcast the heavens, and the earth had trembled so violently

that rocks had been rent, and the stones which closed the sepulchres had been moved from their places, so that the remains of the dead were exposed to the view of the alarmed passers by. The history does not say that at the time of the crucifixion the dead arose, but that "after his resurrection," they awoke, and came into the city and appeared to many. The third day after the death of Jesus, he rose from the dead. The knowledge of this startling event must have been rumoured abroad, whispered over the city, through the guard, and among the disciples of Jesus, with the greatest rapidity, some time before the full evidence of the fact was published. Consider how the public heart was throbbing with excitement. Think how fearfully the minds of the tender and susceptible, of those especially, whose thoughts, from one cause or another, as from the recent loss of near friends, were dwelling upon the mysteries of the other world, must have been agitated by all that Jesus had said and done, by the awful circumstances of his death, by the darkness and the earthquake and the rending of rocks and the opening of tombs and the sight of the dead, and, lastly, by the startling rumour of his resurrection, and then you will see how impressively it accords with the perturbed state of men's imaginations, that there should have been visions, and stories and rumours of ghosts and apparitions. Observe, the historian does not say that he himself, or any of the disciples, saw the dead who awoke, but that they "were seen by many." It is not merely to meet the difficulty which serious and well-disposed minds have found in this portion of the history, that I suggest this view of the case. It goes infinitely further. It reveals a world of truth, nature and evidence. It not only furnishes the strongest presumption of the truth of the great central facts, the death and

resurrection of Jesus, but it also reveals the tremendous depth of the impression which his life and death had made. It discloses undesignedly the existence of precisely such a state of feeling as must have been produced by the events previously narrated, if these events really took place. In a word, it is in beautiful and unconscious accordance with the nature of the human mind, and I cannot express the strength of conviction which it adds to my faith.

It shows in what estimation Jesus was held, that persons so eminent as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, members of the Jewish Sanhedrim, should have been solicitous to see him decently interred. They went to the Roman Governor and obtained permission to bury Jesus. The body was taken down from the cross about sunset on Friday, and laid in a new tomb belonging to Joseph, near the place of execution. The female friends of Jesus, whose affection was less alloyed than that of the other disciples by selfish ambition, were still faithful to him. They watched the body while it remained on the Cross, and took care to see, when it was removed, where it was deposited, that they might pay to the precious remains every possible office of respect. His other followers evidently regarded his death as the utter ruin of those high hopes he had inspired. If it be doubted whether he actually predicted his own death and resurrection, then it must be admitted that his disciples had no expectation of these events. That they had no distinct idea that he would rise again appears very plainly from the circumstance that, only a few hours before he was seized by his enemies, while he was observing the Passover with his disciples, they disputed which should take precedence in that splendid kingdom, whose es-

tablishment they so fondly expected. When at last he was hung upon the Cross, when he had expired there, they were overwhelmed by the terrible fact. In the wretchedness of that one conviction—that he was dead, dead, they felt that all was over. Their dearest hopes were scattered to the winds.

Some have found it difficult to understand how it was that the disciples did not recollect after the death of their master, the assurances, which he gave them, and which were very explicit, of his resurrection. To my mind, the reason is obvious why his predictions made no distinct impression on their minds, and retained no place in their memories. They believed him to be the Messiah, that magnificent Prince. While he was living, the idea of his dying as he actually did was of all things the most shocking to their minds. They must have rejected it with an instinctive horror. A great deal of his language sounded enigmatical in their ears, on account of their strong prejudices. And it is highly probable that, when he spake of his death, they supposed he was speaking figuratively, and that his words had some other than their obvious meaning. Consequently their actual signification never fully entered their minds, until they were wholly interpreted by his resurrection and they saw him again alive. In the meanwhile, the one overwhelming fact of his death absorbed their attention, and render them incapable of reverting to the past with any satisfaction.

It is interesting to remark that his predictions of his death and resurrection appear always to have been uttered upon those occasions when the earthly hopes of his disciples must have been most strongly excited. (See Matth. xvi. 21, Mark x. 32, and Luke ix. 43.) The passage in Luke is particularly remarkable. "And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God.

But while they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did, he said unto his disciples, Let these sayings sink down into your ears, for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men. But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not; and they feared to ask him of that saying."

Through no weakness did he ever lose sight of his awful fate. While all around him were magnifying him, filled with amazement at his extraordinary power, the tumultuous feeling that heaved in all hearts shook not him. Not for an instant was he blinded to his true and fearful destiny.

We see here why it was that his personal disciples failed to comprehend at the time what he meant, when he spake of his sufferings and death. How strange and inexplicable must his language have appeared to those who were confidently expecting him to assume a princely state and authority, and never more confidently than after he had wrought some mighty work!

The utterance of such language under such circumstances, even though it was not rightly understood at the moment, was strikingly fitted to make an ineffaceable impression on the minds of his disciples, and the words of Jesus must have recurred to them afterwards, when subsequent events began to interpret their meaning, with a distinct and overwhelming force.

The near approach of the Sabbath caused the burial of Jesus to be brief and hurried. The Jewish Priests and elders, holding him to be an impostor, and therefore not having the same difficulty in understanding his predictions, which his disciples had, recollected that he had said he would rise again from the dead on the third day. They caught eagerly at his prophecy, in

its literal sense, and trusted to disprove it. Accordingly they procured a guard of soldiers to be stationed at the place where the body of Jesus was laid, and thus they expected by the event to destroy his credit for ever.

“In Joseph’s tomb, how sweet is the sleep of Jesus! There is nothing in that peaceful retreat to trouble him. His pains were acute, but they overpowered him at last—he was weary of his sufferings, and now he is at rest. Now, there is no anguish in his countenance, and there never will be more. How placid is that slumber! He feels no more the cruel scourge; he has forgotten the accursed tree. Ye Priests and rulers, ye cannot wake him to renew your persecutions. Terror has no more horrid spectacles to set before him. Pain has no more darts to throw, and death’s last blow is struck. Peter, he thinks no more of thy denial; even the infidelity of Judas disturbs him not. This peaceful sleep is not for a moment interrupted by the remembrance, either of insulting enemies, or forsaking friends.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RESURRECTION.

“ And when thou didst arise, thou didst not stand
 With Devastation in thy red right hand,
 Plaguing the guilty city's murtherous crew ;
 But thou didst haste to meet
 The Women's coming feet,
 And bear the words of peace unto the faithful few.”

MILMAN.

THE account which I shall here insert, of the circumstances which took place on the third day after the death of Jesus, is, with considerable additions, the same that originally appeared in the *Christian Examiner*, (Jan. 1834.) As some, whose judgment I respect greatly, were pleased to characterise it then as more ingenious than true, I have been led to review it more than once with particular care. The only consequence has been an increased conviction of the substantial truth of the following explanation of this portion of the History. The reader will perhaps think this result natural enough. Still I may be allowed to say that my respect for the opinion of those, who are unable to assent to my representation of this memorable event, is so great that I cannot but think I should have relinquished the peculiar views I have suggested, or at least looked upon them with diminished interest, if they did not rest upon grounds of no ordinary strength. I solicit attention to one or two preliminary considerations.

I will first, however, for the convenience of the reader, insert here those portions of the four Gospels, which relate to the subject.

Matth. xxviii. 1—11. "In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here; for he is risen as he said. Come see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead: and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run and bring his disciples word. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them saying, All hail. And they came, and held him by the feet and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me. Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and showed unto the chief priests all the things that were done."

Mark xvi. 1—8. "And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre, at

the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side clothed in a long white garment, and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted. Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth which was crucified: he is risen: he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter, that he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid."

Luke xxiv. 1—12. "Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold two men stood by them, in shining garments; And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen; remember how he spake unto you, when he was yet in Galilee, saying, the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words, and returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven and the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, who told these things to the Apostles. And their words

seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not. Then arose Peter and ran unto the sepulchre, and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass."

John xx. 1—18. "The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth and cometh to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And he stooping down saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie; and the napkin that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple who came first to the sepulchre, and he saw and believed. For as yet they knew not the Scripture that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went away again unto their own home. But Mary stood without at the door of the sepulchre, weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down *and looked* into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white, sitting the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, woman. why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith

unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and said unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, my master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father, but go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her."

1. Presuming the reader has read over these passages with care, I beg him to observe in the first place, that they all state that the particulars related took place *very early* in the morning, and that the last account, the only one that purports to be the testimony of one of the individuals personally present at the sepulchre, (John) states that it was *yet dark*. Surely this is a circumstance that should be allowed some weight, even though the witnesses were the keenest observers. Add to this the circumstance that the light in the sepulchre could not have been the strongest, as it appears that they who went into it were compelled to stoop. It must have descended more or less abruptly into the earth.

2. It deserves serious attention that it was not Peter nor John, nor any of the male friends of Jesus, but *women* who saw *angels* at the tomb. Is the constitutional difference of the sexes—the peculiar sensibility and imaginativeness of the female character, to be wholly disregarded by a sincere seeker after truth?

3. Not only were they women who reported the appearance of angels at the sepulchre, but women, of

whom we are expressly told that they were startled and hurried into a false conclusion the moment they perceived that the stone had been moved from the tomb, and were afterwards so affected by affright and joy, that they trembled and bowed their faces to the earth, and were almost speechless with amazement.

4. It must not be overlooked that two of the historians in the foregoing passages make no mention of *angels*. Mark says that the women saw a *young man in a long white garment*, and Luke says that they saw two *men* in shining garments.

5. The above-mentioned circumstances affect the accounts now to be examined, as mere human accounts. A due regard to these circumstances is not at all inconsistent with a full acknowledgment of the moral and intellectual competency of the persons concerned. When, in accordance with the foregoing considerations, I venture to doubt whether the women saw angels at the sepulchre, I *do not distrust their statement of the testimony of their senses, but only the inferences which, in the agitation of their minds, they drew from that testimony*. And this distrust, I maintain, is dictated by the soundest principles of thought and interpretation. I do not say that the women thought they saw angels when they saw nothing, but that they misapprehended what they saw. Most assuredly I treat them with no disrespect. In the accounts of this very scene, we are expressly told of two mistakes which they made. When they saw the stone rolled away from the sepulchre, they instantly, without the slightest appearance of misgiving or doubt, caught at the idea that the body of Jesus had been stolen away. This mistake does not affect their testimony as to the fact that the stone was removed. On the contrary, it is so natural a mistake in the then state of their minds, that

it goes to prove the reality of the fact of the removal of the stone. Nothing else could have suggested it. Again, Mary Magdalene saw Jesus and mistook him for the gardener. In view of these things, is there not room, in all candour and honesty, nay, are we not bound by a sincere anxiety to ascertain the real state of the case, to question the inferences which the women drew from what they saw ?

6. The misapprehension into which I am led to believe the women most naturally fell, not only does not affect the reality of the one great fact, the re-appearance of Jesus alive after his death, it lays bare a mass of the most powerful evidence in its favour. Nothing accounts for the misapprehension but the actual presence of Jesus, and this accounts for it in a way the most natural and wholly undesigned. Thus Nature, unconsciously working in the hearts and the imagination of the women, becomes a witness to the truth, and evidence of this kind produces a depth of conviction which the concurrent testimony of a thousand express assertors of the fact never could create.

Let us now, keeping the records before us, mark the circumstances that occurred, and the order in which they took place.

Matthew gives us to understand that, after the women reached the sepulchre, "there was an earthquake, and an angel, with a countenance like lightning, and raiment white as snow, descended from Heaven, and came, and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it." But all the other accounts state that, when the women reached the tomb, the stone was already rolled away. So that the story of the earthquake and the descending angel with a countenance like lightning and raiment white as snow, must have been told

by the soldiers stationed as a guard at the sepulchre, who it is said were so terrified that "they shook and became as dead men!"* There can be no reason why we should not carefully sift the statement of these men, particularly as it is said they were overpowered with fear, a passion which more or less disturbs the power of correct observation, and always disposes to exaggeration. Whether they were understood, or whether they meant to be understood as saying, that they saw the angel descend *visibly* from Heaven, is by no means certain. If they believed that they saw an angel, they would naturally suppose that he came down from Heaven, and express themselves accordingly. It is worthy of notice, that the earthquake is first mentioned, though it appears to be represented as if produced by the angel. The fact which most obviously and naturally explains this story of the earthquake and the angel seems to me to be this: Before it was light, and before the women reached the sepulchre, and when there were no persons at the spot but the guard, Jesus, restored to life, by the extraordinary power with which he was gifted, rolled away the stone and came forth from the sepulchre, clad in the long white habiliments of the grave. The motion of the stone which was "very great," shook the earth, and, as there had been an earthquake the day but one before, the idea of a similar occurrence at once and naturally suggested itself to the minds of the soldiers, who, notwithstanding their violent and daring mode of life, were, as such men frequently are, very susceptible of superstitious fears, and likely to be panic-struck by a circumstance in itself so startling. The sudden motion of the stone, and the appearance of a figure clad in white, filled

* If the women were present when the stone was rolled away, the suspicion would scarcely have been entertained that the body had been removed.

them with a mortal dread, and they fled in haste and affright to the city, reporting that an angel had descended from Heaven with a countenance like lightning, and *raiment white as snow*; that the earth had shaken, and this supernatural messenger had moved the stone from the mouth of the tomb and sat upon it. If we take the report of the soldiers to the letter, then we make no allowance for the strong tendency of fear to exaggeration. That fear always magnifies its object, is a fact as certain as any pertaining to the constitution of man. And to attach no importance to this disturbing influence in the present case, is as unphilosophical as, in calculating the orbit of one of the heavenly bodies, to make no account of the forces of the other bodies which most nearly approach it.

It is interesting to observe how much the story told by the soldiers proves when thus understood. It may be asked, how do we know but that this whole account of a guard stationed at the sepulchre is a mere fabrication, designed to make the resurrection of Jesus appear more marvellous and true? It is found in only one of the four Histories. The others say nothing of any soldiers at the tomb. In reply I observe that the very fact that only one of the histories makes any mention of the guard, shows that no great importance was attached to their presence on the spot by the personal followers of Jesus. The disciples, it is most probable, knew nothing until after his resurrection about the tomb's being watched.* And then the evidence they had of the fact of his having risen was so full and satisfying, that it was a small matter to them what the guard said, or whether there was any guard at all at the sepulchre. But this is not all. The very story

* The women certainly did not. Otherwise they could hardly have visited the tomb with the object they had in view.

which the soldiers told, bearing all the natural marks of exaggeration, showing so undesignedly that it emanated from minds overpowered with terror, establishes, in a manner unspeakably impressive, the fact that there were persons there, human minds and human senses, thus to be acted upon.

Immediately after the departure of the guard, some women, friends and relatives of Jesus, approached the sepulchre. They brought spices with them to embalm the body. They came before the dawn of day, partly perhaps to avoid observation, and partly, that no time might be lost in the performance of the sacred offices of humanity. As they drew near the spot, questioning among themselves, whom they should procure to roll away the stone from the entrance of the tomb, they observed that it was already rolled away. Taking alarm at this circumstance, they instantly and most naturally surmised, having so recently witnessed the relentless hatred of his enemies, and thinking of him then only as the unresisting object of their bitterest persecution, that the body of Jesus must have been removed from the place where his friends had laid it. Without waiting to ascertain the correctness of the inference, Mary of Magdala rushed back to the city to inform the disciples. John, who alone relates the circumstance of Mary's immediate return to the city, does not mention that any other woman accompanied her to the tomb. Still, in the most incidental manner, it appears even from his narrative, taken by itself, that others had gone with her to the sepulchre. He tells us that upon her arrival in the city, Mary said to Peter and himself, "They have taken away the master out of the sepulchre, and *we* know not where they have laid him."

After Mary had left the place, the other women who

stood at the mouth of the sepulchre, full of surprise and wondering what the removal of the stone could mean, were unexpectedly accosted by what appeared to them, as Mark says, '*a young man in a long white garment*,' or, as Luke says, '*by two men in shining garments*,' or, according to Matthew, by the angel, '*with raiment white as snow*,' that rolled away the stone. This person, as I suppose, was Jesus himself, just restored to life and still arrayed in the long white linen in which his body was wrapt when it was taken from the cross. In the dimness of the light, the long white garment of this unknown person, "the fine linen," was the most prominent circumstance. Accordingly we find it mentioned in all the accounts. But Luke mentions two persons clad in white. Were there two? I am aware that the mention of only one by Matthew and Mark does not prove positively that there were not two. As a general rule the omissions of one witness do not negative the assertions of another. Still in the case of such extraordinary appearances, the omission is not so natural as if the facts related were of a more common character. Besides, if there were two, although only one spoke, he would have spoken, or he would have been reported to speak, in the plural. But there is no use of the plural in what was said by this unknown person as reported by either of the historians, and Matthew represents the angel as using the first person singular.* And further, the tendency of fear is to magnify. So that on the whole, if we had no other means of settling this difficulty, it is more natural that two should be made out of one than that the contrary

* Although John omits to mention the women who accompanied Mary to the tomb, yet he reports her as saying upon her return to the city, "we know not where they have laid him." Here is an instance illustrative of the above remark.

should have been the case. But there is another circumstance that throws light on this point. When Jesus came to life, he must have thrown off the cloth that was wrapt over his face, and it probably lay near the place where his head had rested. When we recollect how often, in a dim light, white objects have been converted into apparitions by the imagination, and how our ideas of the costume of spirits are unconsciously connected with the habiliments of the grave,* is it difficult to conceive that that part of the grave-clothes which Jesus had put off from his head, lying by itself, may have appeared to the highly excited imaginations of some of the women, as another person? Suddenly addressed by a person in white, they were led in the bewilderment of their minds, by the proximity of another white appearance, to conclude there were two persons present so clad. Let me repeat here, it is not the senses of the women, whose evidence I am questioning, but the inferences which, in the precipitation of their terror, they drew from what they saw and heard. From the circumstance that the person who spoke to them knew them, and knew the object which brought them to the place, they as naturally believed that they were in the presence of supernatural beings.

How do the lights of truth and nature break upon us as we proceed! That we should ever have questioned the inspiration of these histories! They are full of it to overflowing,—the divine inspiration of Nature.

Before Jesus addressed the women, he may have discovered from their voices—from their exclamations of surprise—that they were friends of his. Possibly the sound of their approach had caused him to retire

* "*Antiquissimæ enim hoc apud ipsos est consuetudinis in vestimentis albis tumulo mortuos mandare.*" Vide Johann. Buxtorfii *Synag. Jud.* p. 700.

into the tomb, from which he had issued a little while before, to the terror of the soldiers. With that perfect collectedness which marked his conduct even in moments when all around him were excited, he does not attempt to make himself known at a time when the dimness of the light rendered it at least doubtful whether the women would recognise him, when their coming to the spot showed that they had no idea of seeing him alive, and when, more than all, he does not appear to have been prepared to disclose himself. He speaks of himself in the third person, and seeks to allay their alarm. "Be not afraid, ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen, he is not here :* behold the place where they laid him," that is, see, the tomb is empty. "But, go your way. Tell his disciples and Peter, that he goeth before you into Galilee ; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you." These words are differently reported by the three historians. The agitation of the women, which was so great that, as we are told, "they bowed their faces to the earth," accounts for the variation. The introduction of the name of Peter is touchingly characteristic of Jesus, and betrays the speaker. Peter had basely denied all knowledge of his master, and well might he doubt, when he should hear that Jesus had risen, whether he would be forgiven an act, which he could bring himself to forgive only at the price of a long and bitter repentance. Well might he fear that those eyes would be coldly averted from him, the awful calmness of whose glance, the last time they were turned upon him, had sent into his soul the sharpest agony of remorse. But this most generous friend hastened to assure his

* It may be objected that, if it had been Jesus speaking, he could not have said with truth, "He is not here." The meaning of these words evidently is, the dead body is not here, here in the tomb, as you expect to find it. But it is not necessary to suppose that the precise words are reported.

unhappy disciple that the past was forgotten. The women, having received this message, and believing they had received it from an angel, returned with great haste to the city. Let the language of the history be remarked : "they trembled and were amazed, neither said they any thing to any one : for they were afraid."

After their departure, Peter and John, to whom Mary Magdalene had carried the intelligence of the removal of the stone, or rather of the body, for so she construed what she had seen, arrived at the sepulchre. Before they reached the spot, Jesus having found some garments belonging, it has been conjectured, to the gardener,* put off the linen clothes in which his body had been wrapt, throwing off, as I have already said, the cloth which was about his head, so that it lay near where his head had lain, while the remainder he left at the foot of the place where his body had been deposited. John informs us that when he reached the spot, which he did before Peter, he did not dare to go in. A natural feeling of hesitation came over him, and he waited for Peter, who, with characteristic ardour, as soon as he reached the sepulchre, went boldly in. John followed him. They saw no angel. But John mentions with remarkable particularity how they found the grave-clothes,—“the cloth that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.” This minuteness, although the reason of it is not at once obvious, is very natural, and strikes my mind with great force. These two disciples

* If it be considered a question of any interest or importance, how Jesus obtained other and more appropriate clothes, more than one method of solving the difficulty might be proposed. But perhaps it will suffice to remark that the loose garments of the East were easily put on and off, and that there had been a number of persons in the vicinity of the sepulchre, Joseph of Arimathea with his attendants, and afterwards the Roman soldiers. So that it is easy to conjecture how some garments may have been left there.

had run to the tomb under the impression communicated by Mary, that the body of Jesus had been removed. Full of this idea they were greatly surprised at seeing the grave-clothes ; and it perplexed them to understand why, if the body had been taken away, the grave-clothes had not been taken also—why they should have been left folded up with the appearance of so much deliberation. It may be thought strange that the recollection of their Master's prediction did not at this moment flash upon them, and lead them to suspect that he had risen. In the entire absence of any such suspicion, I recognise the unequivocal working of nature. Peter and John were excited by surprise. Now, every one knows that, when any strong feeling is awakened and we are deeply moved, we are not only incapable of calm and connected thought, but the most obvious conclusions are generally the first to be overlooked ; and when our emotion subsides, we are accustomed to find nothing so wonderful as our own want of thought and recollection. This was, I conceive, precisely the case with the two disciples. The quick belief of Mary that the body had been removed, communicated to them with every look and tone of certainty, had full possession of their minds. This idea they ran to the tomb to verify or to remove. They did not go to see whether Jesus had risen, but to ascertain whether the body was there. Intent upon this one point, in their hurry, when they found that the body was indeed gone, then, as John informs us, they "*believed*,"—not, certainly, that Jesus had risen, but that what Mary had said was true, that the body was gone. "For as yet they knew not the scripture that he must rise from the dead."^{*}

^{*} The editors of the Improved Version, (following Newcome,) have introduced the negative in John xx. 8, "he saw, and believed *not*," in order to

After examining the sepulchre, Peter and John returned home, and left Mary standing near the sepulchre weeping. We may suppose that Peter and John, running very swiftly, reached the tomb before Mary, and that when they came out, they said nothing to her except to intimate that it was even so—that the body had disappeared. Possibly they uttered not a word. But she may have gathered from their looks and manner that they had found it as she had said. “And as she wept,” one of the accounts informs us, “she stooped down *and looked* into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white, sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her ‘Woman, why weepest thou?’ She saith unto them, ‘Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.’” This passage is very curious, and I intreat the close attention of the reader.

In the first place it is to be considered that the sepulchre was dark in a degree, and that Mary’s eyes were dimmed with tears.

2. If what she saw were really angels, it deserves notice that they served no purpose. They communicated no intelligence.

3. If, the moment she caught sight of them, they spoke to her, it is somewhat strange and unnatural that she should have answered them with so much collect-
edness.

4. On the other hand, if she had full and deliberate

accommodate the text to an interpretation which the slightest glance at the ninth verse shows to be an improbable interpretation, to say the least. The authority of Griesbach is in favour of the common reading. Even Gilbert West, in his well-known “Observations on the History and Evidence of the Resurrection, &c.” refers the belief of John to the fact of the resurrection of Jesus, and not to the report of Mary that the body had been removed. See Watson’s Tracts, vol. v. p. 320. Priestley also makes the same reference.

view of them, it is equally or more strange that she should have answered them as she did, retaining the impression that the body had been taken away, when the supernatural vision before her was so powerfully calculated to check her tears instantly, and to suggest the idea that God and not man had visited the sepulchre.

Finally, it is remarkable that, as soon as she had answered the question, she turned round and saw Jesus standing near her, not knowing that it was he. Are we too bold in suspecting that she mistook what she saw in the sepulchre, a dark place comparatively, when, at almost the same moment, she mistook the familiar countenance of one standing in the open air, and in the morning light? If she had seen angels in the tomb, would she have turned away so readily? Would she not have been prepared to recognise Jesus? Would she have turned round immediately, forgetting the angels apparently, still persisting in the idea that the body of Jesus had been stolen, and said to him, in reply to his questions, 'Woman, why weepest thou, whom seekest thou,' supposing him to be the gardener! "Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away." I do not suggest these questions captiously, but with a desire, which no apprehension of being misunderstood can repress, to ascertain the truth.

From a careful consideration of these circumstances, I arrive at the following view of the case. I suppose that as Mary stood weeping by the sepulchre, she stooped down and looked into it. Her attention was immediately arrested by the white appearances—the grave-clothes which lay there. I do not suppose that she knew what it was she saw. As she believed that the body had been taken away, she must have pre-

sumed, before she looked into the tomb, that the grave-clothes were taken away also. I do not imagine that she was alarmed, but only perplexed, somewhat surprised, as Peter and John had just been before. I doubt whether she thought at the moment that she saw angels, as the two disciples had just come out of the tomb, and though their appearance may have indicated concern and perplexity, they had shown no signs of having seen any thing supernatural in the sepulchre. Just as she looked into the tomb, and caught sight of the white objects, a voice addressed her, producing a slight bewilderment but hardly fear. Before she had finished answering it, her ear caught the sound of some one approaching behind her, and she immediately turned round and saw Jesus, but did not at once recognise him. Not dreaming of seeing him alive, she did not turn fully round at first,* she merely glanced at the person who spoke to her. Natural enough, too, is it to suppose that, in telling the cause of her grief, in alluding to her lost friend, her tears burst forth afresh, until she was almost blinded with them. I suppose that the first question, 'Woman, why weepest thou?' which in the history is attributed to the angels, was put by Jesus, who, unobserved himself, had approached her and seen her attitude of grief. It may be doubted whether at the moment Mary supposed that the first question came from the sepulchre. I presume that at first she did not exactly know—scarcely thought from what direction it came. Before she finished her reply she heard some one near her. As soon as she turned round, Jesus repeated the question, 'Woman, why weepest thou?' adding, 'whom seekest thou?' This addition

* 'She did not turn fully round at first.' This appears from the circumstance that shortly afterwards, when Jesus said unto her "' Mary,' she *turned herself*, and said," &c.

countenances the conjecture that the question, which Mary afterwards supposed came from the angels, was in fact put by Jesus standing behind her, unobserved. Nothing is more natural and common, when we have addressed an interrogatory to another, and received no direct reply, than to repeat it with additions in a varied form.

When Jesus perceived that Mary did not know him, he said unto her "Mary!" The tone of that voice thrilled her whole frame. How simple and touching—how true to nature and to the character of Jesus was this mode of making himself known! There is a divine simplicity here which the heart feels, but the pen in vain attempts to describe. How vividly does the scene present itself before us! We hear that beloved voice uttering in a subdued, half-inquiring tone of tenderness and solemnity, the simple name of Mary. We see her countenance and whole frame suddenly convulsed by the most powerful emotions of amazement, awe, and delight. At one moment she shrinks back with uplifted hands, and with eyes starting from their sockets, and at the next falls clasping his knees and gasping out the exclamation, "Rabboni!"*

* See page 245. The remarks there made upon the retaining of the original in the case of two of the miracles, are applicable to the same feature of the narrative here. The word 'Rabboni' is a common word, and the narrator translates it immediately. But words are often untranslatable, less for the want of terms significant of the same meaning in the language into which the translation is made, than from the absence of some strong but indefinable associations which give to the original a peculiar expressiveness. Hence it is that poetry so seldom survives translation. The exclamation "Rabboni!" was the inspiration of the moment, the symbol which was seized by Nature, working mightily in and through the deepest emotions of Mary, whereby to express itself. Thus this particular sound had to Mary herself and to those who listened to her story a power of expression, which no other articulate sound could convey. What volumes does this one word speak for the reality of the great fact, *the appearance of Jesus alive*, which produced such overwhelming emotion!

When Mary had recognised Jesus, he said unto her, "Touch me not : for I am not yet ascended to my Father : but go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." These words are obscure. But a natural explanation results from a reference to Matthew's account. Matthew says that Jesus appeared first, as they were returning, to *all* the women who visited the tomb. It is natural that such a mistake should have arisen in the hurry with which these exciting events followed one another. Shortly after the women had come into the city, saying they had seen angels at the sepulchre, who said that Jesus had risen, Mary came in saying she had seen Jesus himself. Now as, in the first instance, all the women, Mary with the rest, had gone out to the tomb, it is natural that the story of the women should have been blended with that of Mary, and that it should have been understood by some, that all the women had seen Jesus. Matthew tells us that when the women saw Jesus, they fell down and *held him by his feet*. Now as it was Mary only to whom Jesus appeared, it must have been Mary who held him by his feet. He said unto her, therefore, in effect, 'Detain me not, do not stop now to embrace me, for I do not yet ascend to my Father. You will have other opportunities of seeing me ; Go now to my brethren and tell them, &c.' When Mary told the disciples she had seen their master alive, as they were incredulous, they intimated, in all probability, that it was an illusion of which she had been the subject, that she had seen a spectre. She would naturally insist, in reply, that she had not only seen him, but that she had *touched* him,—that she had held him by his feet, and knew that it was real flesh and blood. Hence the

phrase in Matthew, 'and they held him by his feet.' As upon this act of embracing the feet of Jesus much stress must have been laid, as an evidence of the touch to the reality of his appearance, it is possible that the exact words addressed to Mary by Jesus may have been altered, and he may have been made to say "*Touch* me not," when he used a term nearly synonymous but less obscure.

After Mary had seen Jesus, she returned to the city. There she met the other women, and found that they had seen what they considered as angels. Was it not very natural then that she should instantly conclude that the white objects, which she had seen in the sepulchre, were the very angels who had been seen by her friends, and had spoken to them? The appearances which had startled her were now explained. And when afterwards she related her part in the exciting scenes of that eventful morning, she hesitated not to say that she had seen the angels.

Throughout these portions of the New Testament which we have now examined, there is the fine working of Nature, free, true, and unsophisticated. But it is not ostentatiously pointed out and displayed. The writers of the histories seem utterly unconscious of it. It is revealed wholly without design. The fact of the re-appearance of Jesus alive is involved in this seamless and living web of Nature, not woven by hands, to which it gives beauty and perfection, and in which it is arrayed, so that this great fact of the Resurrection comes before us clad in the graceful and imperishable garb of Truth. In a word, the unconscious naturalness of the states of mind disclosed in the participants of these thrilling scenes, is revealed by the supposition

of the unrecognised presence of Jesus, and this again is in its turn corroborated by all the nature which it reveals.

At first view the four accounts of the resurrection of Jesus appear to be altogether irregular, brief and fragmentary. And so perhaps they are when tried by the formal and narrow principles of human systems and tribunals. When these historians are treated as witnesses in human courts sometimes are, subjected only to such interrogatories as one and another may be disposed to put to serve some private cause—some partisan purpose—it must be confessed they make but a poor appearance. Oftentimes they are but dumb witnesses, and again their answers appear vague, wandering, and aimless. But let them be questioned by a simple love of truth, mingled with a wise reverence for nature, and then they are transfigured, and truth and nature recognise in them their own inspiration. And these writings in the most important and interesting sense are wonderful for the harmony and completeness they display.

Even if we had no knowledge of the precise circumstances under which the first appearance of Jesus after his resurrection took place, that he did re-appear after his death I could not doubt, not merely because so many instances of his presenting himself to his disciples are expressly specified, but because, without any effort or design on the part of the historians, the identity of his character before and after his death is so perfectly preserved. It is impossible that any one could have fabricated a personage whose tone of sentiment and expression should be in perfect accordance with that wonderful being who had a little while before expired on the Cross. No human art could have added

another chapter to that life. How characteristic in its simplicity the manner in which he made himself known to Mary! We recognise him almost as readily as she did. Again, how like Jesus those words addressed to the incredulous disciple, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Once more, that thrice repeated question addressed to Peter,* 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?' how wonderfully is it in keeping with the character of Jesus, and with all that had gone before! How delicately, and yet how powerfully was it fitted to induce Peter to search his own soul, and abate something of that self-confidence which had, on former occasions, been so fatal to him. Besides, if Jesus had not re-appeared, I am wholly at a loss to conceive how his history could have escaped being buried with him. When he expired on the Cross, there was not a man, not even of his most intimate friends, who understood him.

Here, in its obvious necessity to give light and impulse to his followers, do I discover the principal object of his resurrection. I am aware that the general belief is that he rose from the dead to establish the doctrine of the life beyond the grave. But it is not in this way that Christ confirms my hope of immortality. I behold in him, in all that he said and did, the exhibition of a spiritual and immortal nature. If he had appeared in an angel's garb, and with an angel's wings, I could not have evidence that he belonged to another and imperishable world, so strong as that which presents itself not to my eye but to my soul—my consciousness—in his moral lineaments. In his spiritual truth and greatness I behold an unearthly halo, the living light of Eternity; and as I discern and feel that, I feel and know

* See John xxi. 15—19.

myself to be possessed of a like immortal nature. So that it is not by the bare fact of his resurrection that I am convinced of another and unending existence. His resurrection, as it is a part and a prominent part of the grand spiritual manifestation, has its office in revealing the eternal world. But the primary purpose of his rising from the dead, as he himself more than once declared, was, like a sign from Heaven, to vindicate his authority. His authority it did establish gloriously, so far at least as his immediate followers were concerned. Although they continued to cherish the Jewish hope of an outward kingdom, still his death and resurrection wrought with them to induce them to postpone that fond hope, and though they never appear to have relinquished it altogether, yet it gave way in their minds to the authority of him who had given such glorious attestations of the divinity of his mission and office.

I do not intend to dwell upon his Ascension, because there is no language in any one of the four Gospels, that necessarily implies that he ascended *visibly*. Matthew and John do not say a word about his final disappearance. Mark says, "So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God." We might with as much reason infer from this language that they saw him seated on the right hand of God as that they saw him received up into Heaven. When he bade them farewell, they concluded of course that he had gone to Heaven, and that he was placed at the right hand of the Eternal throne, and they express themselves agreeably to this impression. And so Luke says, "And it came to pass while he blessed them, he was parted from them and carried up into Heaven." That he

was separated from them is clear. They would so naturally conclude that he was carried up to Heaven, that we cannot determine from this language whether they mean to say that they saw him carried up, or whether it was only their inference. I can only say that I am deeply struck with the silence of these accounts as to the mode in which Jesus came and went on the various occasions on which he presented himself to his disciples. That he did appear again and again to different individuals, and to large numbers, they fearlessly declare. They are not deterred from stating the fact of his appearance at different times by any apprehension of the doubts that might be stated as to the manner in which he appeared and disappeared. If they were conscious of any difficulty on this point, they still do not hesitate to say that he did appear. But I imagine they were unconscious of difficulty. After the death of a friend, in the first agony of our loss, how fondly do we pray that he would only come back once more, were it but for a moment, that we might look on him and hear him speak, or exchange a mute farewell! Could so much be granted us, we feel ready to suspend all curiosity, to keep down within every question concerning the mode in which he might come and go. So was it with the disciples. When their master was present, they were too much filled with awe, too tremblingly impressed, too anxious to catch every word that fell from his lips, to speculate about the way in which he came and went. There is to my mind a sublimity in the darkness which wraps the close of this history, analogous to what we perceive in the ways of Providence and Nature.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

"If thou ask to what height man has carried it in this matter, look on our divinest symbol; on Jesus of Nazareth, and his life, and his biography, and what followed therefrom. Higher has the human thought not yet reached. This is Christianity and Christendom; a symbol of quite perennial, infinite character; whose significance will ever demand to be anew inquired into, and anew made manifest."

CARLYLE.

IN works upon the Evidences of Christianity, the question commonly discussed concerning the four Gospels is, 'Were they written by the persons whose names they bear?' as if the settlement of this point were the strongest possible confirmation of our faith. But, I confess, all that I can learn of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, does not give me so lively a confidence in the authors of these histories as is created in me by the histories themselves. To say merely that they are honest and impartial, appears to me most inadequate praise. By studying them in the manner which I have now attempted, I find my conceptions of the honest, the true, the candid, enlarged and enlightened. The character of Jesus is not more truly a revelation of moral greatness than these wonderful writings are, in their style and structure, of the quality of truth. That this is strong language I am aware; and perhaps there is little in the foregoing pages that seems to

justify it. Still I do not wholly despair of having given the candid and intelligent reader some idea of the grounds upon which rests the conviction I have already expressed, that no where in the writings of the dead, or in the characters of the living, do I discern evidences of integrity and singleness of mind so luminous and affecting as those presented in the four Gospels.

I beg the reader to pause for one moment, and consider the character of the events which constitute the sum and substance of these narratives. How tremendously exciting must they have been! The blind seeing, the lame walking, the dead raised, the wretched and the profligate collected in crowds, listening to words of mercy and hope, multitudes thronging the highways bringing their sick, and pressing upon one another like the billows of a heaving sea! If Jesus of Nazareth spoke and acted and suffered as he is here represented, how must the minds of men have boiled around him! How closely and with what power must he have approached their passions, prejudices, sentiments! How must he, as with a giant's hand, have broken up all the fountains of wonder and fear and awe and hope, and made all hearts overflow with one or another passion!

Could you have been present, and, by some strong philosophic effort, could you have torn off your attention from the absorbing interest of those scenes, and asked yourself the simple question, how can any idea of these things ever be communicated to those who do not see them, you would have exclaimed at once and aloud, 'It is impossible!' You might have glanced around upon those eager multitudes, but where would you have discovered a single calm observer? Where would you have seen a single eye that was not like a

burning coal, a single bosom that was not heaving in tumultuous and overpowering sympathy with the unprecedented spectacle? You would indeed have seen One there, all calm and collected, the producer of all this emotion; but the dovelike serenity of his demeanour would only have tended to deepen in your eyes the mystery and excitement of the scene. I repeat it you would have felt that it was impossible that any accounts could ever be given of events so exciting, save such as were wretchedly inadequate, or so coloured and exaggerated as to convey no just conception of the truth. When we witness any thing that stirs up our feelings—any uncommon burst of eloquence for instance—we either give up in despair every attempt to describe what we have witnessed, or, in the attempt to describe it, the reality is most sadly marred and dwarfed, and we take that single step which separates the sublime from the ridiculous.

Look now at the accounts which have come down to us of the wonderful words, works, and sufferings, of that unrivalled being who appeared some ages since in Judea. Perhaps they give us but a faint idea of the strange and stirring events of which they treat, and with all our efforts, our impressions, in distinctness and intensity, must fall far, very far short of those which were made upon the actual witnesses of the life of Jesus. The power of language was not equal to so great a subject. Still from these records, such as they are, we derive ideas of moral beauty and greatness, to which no page in the world's history furnishes any thing that we can compare. An instance of moral life is disclosed to us which stands alone and unapproached in its wholeness and symmetry. At the same time, abundant evidence is afforded in the course of these narratives that all around Jesus were more or less the

creatures of feeling, ignorance, and prejudice, fettered by superstition, beguiled by coarse hopes and dreams of outward splendour. And as they were men, how must they have been overpowered, bereft of all presence of mind by the very wonders they witnessed! Who were they,—our curiosity is immediately aroused to ask, who were they that, among those excitable and excited crowds, were able to observe so calmly, and report so correctly; to look on and listen with eyes and ears and hearts so true, that, with a slight effort, we are able, in some few instances at least, to feel almost as if we were present on the spot, and the things related were passing visibly before us? To this question there is only one answer. *The character of Jesus must have created his biographers.* Whoever they were, whatever their names, they must have been persons who by intimate association with him had imbibed some measure of his spirit, and that spirit, calm and true, had wrought upon their minds, to subdue the tumults of feeling, to chasten their imaginations, to subordinate their sensibility to the Wonderful to their sensibility to the True, in fine, to qualify them to hear and see aright, and to impart what they saw and heard. Upon examination we find, throughout these writings, the most touching indications of precisely that calm and elevated tone of mind and feeling which association with such a one as Jesus was fitted to produce. In their unguardedness, in their unsuspecting simplicity, in their pervading unconsciousness, we see that these authors had completely lost themselves, lost all anxiety about effect, every disposition to embellish, in the abiding and absorbing sense of truth. The facts—facts of which they had such full knowledge,—filled their minds to the exclusion of all self-reference, all fears and misgivings. They tell right on

what they know, taking no credit to themselves, and unconscious that there can be any thing meritorious in a faithful relation of what so entirely possesses their minds. To the authors of the Gospels, so far as they are disclosed in their writings, may be applied the language of Wordsworth in his Ode to Duty.

"There are, who ask not if thine eye
Be on them, who in love and truth
Where no misgiving is, rely
Upon the genial sense of youth;
Glad hearts! without reproach or blot,
Who do thy work and know it not."

Not indeed "upon the genial sense of youth" did the Evangelists rely, but upon a kindred spirit. Between him and the young, of whom he said, "of such is the kingdom of heaven," there was the greatest congeniality. His spirit had gradually infused itself into the mind of these writers, until it became as their life-blood, unconsciously animating all their thoughts, inspiring their words, and producing in them the simplicity, the "unchartered freedom" of childhood. It cost them no effort to tell the truth. They could as well have ceased to breathe, as ceased to tell it, let the objections and difficulties it created be what they might. Their reverence for Jesus was so great, their confidence in him so entire, that they never appear to have thought that the most imperfect representation of any part of his conduct was not enough—that he could ever need to be indebted to their pens to save him from being misunderstood. With the poet just quoted, they seem to have thought that their theme

"— might demand a seraph's tongue,
Were it not equal to its own support;
And therefore no incompetence of *theirs*
Could do it wrong."*

* The Excursion. Book 8.

Accordingly they never think of explaining or setting off any thing they relate concerning him. Thus they show how genuine was their love of their master. This love it was which was their "unerring light," their security against every false bias, enabling them to see what they saw so nearly at the true point of view. In a word, the great subject of their narratives is treated by them in the same way in which he himself treated truth, "with an unconcern truly sublime."

That these writers could not have invented the extraordinary character which they have portrayed is, I trust, abundantly clear from the whole structure of their narratives, wrought all over and inlaid with the characteristics not of fiction but of truth, and especially from the unconscious manner in which the character of Christ is described. The ability, if it existed, to produce so remarkable an invention, necessarily involves qualities of mind and heart, a fine sense of moral truth, utterly inconsistent with the delusion or fraud which such a fabrication would imply. But the ability did not exist. True and single-hearted as the authors of these biographies of Jesus show themselves to have been, still on more than one occasion it appears that there was a spirituality in his sentiments, a meaning in his words, which none of those around him, not even the best disposed, were able to fathom. But further. While it is impossible to conceive how the biographers could have created such a character, it is easy to see how such a character produced the biographers. So far from supposing that they fabricated what they have told, the question is, how with their Jewish prejudices, with their human sensibilities, rendering them liable to be bewildered, carried away, and deluded by their feelings, they were able to attain to such a pervading truthfulness, and to represent Jesus, so nearly as they have

done, to the life. That they have committed some errors and mistakes, I do not deny—I believe. That these are so few is the wonder. That there is so much truth in these narratives, so simply and truly exhibited—this it is that should surprise us, and for which we should seek a cause. The influence of Jesus at once adequately and naturally explains the character of these writings; and shows us how their authors became the honest, fearless, single-hearted men they have shown themselves to be. Where else but from him could they have derived the spirit that they breathe? In this way these histories are, in the truth of their structure, a tribute, none the less expressive because wholly undesigned, to the force of that remarkable character with which they bring us acquainted. In their general tone and spirit they are as truly an illustration, not merely of the existence but of the moral influence of Jesus, as any of the particular facts which they contain.

I admit that there are errors and mistakes in the Gospels. This, I suppose, will be deemed a dangerous admission. But let me not be misunderstood—I will not say, misrepresented, for I love to believe that these pages “will come under the perusal of ingenuous eyes, and be felt a little by the hearts that look out of them.” Let me not be misunderstood. I say there are mistakes in the Gospels. But they are precisely such mistakes as were occasioned by the truth. Where there are misconceptions there must be something, some reality, some fact, to be misconceived. Error implies Truth as the shadow implies the substance. Such at least is the character of the mistakes which we discover in these writings. They result from the substantial truth of the main facts recorded, and they are undesignedly the most decisive evidences of the truth. For

instance, these accounts differ as to the hour at which the Crucifixion of Jesus took place. Mark states that Jesus was crucified at the third hour. According to John, he was not given up by Pilate until about the sixth hour. Now admitting, as I conceive we must, notwithstanding the attempts which have been made to reconcile this difference, that one or the other of the narrators is in error, what does the error show? Not that Jesus was not crucified at all,—it goes to establish the fact by new and most natural evidence. The existence of the error discloses precisely such a state of mind, such an inability to note the lapse of time, as must have been produced in those nearly interested in an event so exciting. So also in the case of the resurrection of Jesus, the mistakes made by the women at the sepulchre furnish evidence undesigned and unanswerable to the reality of the main fact, the actual presence of Jesus alive. This it was that produced the mistakes, and produced them in a perfectly natural way. In short I conceive it may be confidently affirmed, that no error can be detected in these narratives which does not tend directly and decisively to establish far more than it does away.

The books which we have now been examining are invaluable for the saving knowledge which they give us of Jesus Christ, of whose life they are the record, and of whose spirit they are an unconscious illustration. In him I see a revelation of religious truth, and consequently a disclosure of the will of God, a representation of the perfection and destiny of man. When we see Jesus Christ as he is, we have come to the knowledge and possession of Christianity. He shows us what God is and what He would have us to be. In the spiritual and immortal lineaments of Jesus, we discover our own

immortality, and in sympathy with him we come to feel and know ourselves to be immortal. To estimate him is to grow in Christian knowledge, and to become worthy of the Christian name.

It is a character of no ordinary force which has for eighteen hundred years commanded the respect of the world. Christianity, in the forms in which it has been for ages extensively represented, has shown but few features of a heavenly origin. It has been set forth before the world as a religion identified with a most magnificent and complicated structure of outward ceremonies. Its sanction has been claimed for the exercise of a power, which knew hardly any limit, over national affairs and the rights of private opinion. At one time it was promulgated by bishops clad in mail and demanding faith at the point of the sword. And in all periods of its history, the appeal for its security and its triumphs has been directly made to the civil arm, or to those prejudices and passions which for ever war against human liberty. Under the banner of the Cross, that symbol of the divine power of an unresisting spirit, acts of the bloodiest violence have been perpetrated, the most merciless persecutions carried on. Opinions concerning God and man have been published under the name of Christianity, contradicting not only the first dictates of the understanding, but every natural sentiment of justice and mercy; and the terrors of this world and the next have been threatened upon the faintest whisper of dissent. In fine, that which has been called Christianity, instead of taking its place in the van of human interests, has been found opposing the progress of our race by all the weapons which ignorance and passion could supply. Not by one only, but by all denominations of its friends, has our Religion

been made to occupy more or less decisively this position.

When these things are considered, the question arises 'how comes it—by what means—by what principle of vitality—has Christianity maintained itself for long ages in the world? Forced, through the unwise zeal of its friends, to ally itself with the worldly interests and passions of men, taking so little pains to address the better principles of our nature,—how is it that amidst all vicissitudes and the various and increasing lights of civilization, it has not long ago been shaken to its foundations, levelled with the dust, and swept away with the fragments of many preceding and contemporaneous empires?' I find the principal answer to this inquiry in the person of its Founder, in the simple force of his character.

It was this which wrought the most powerfully for Christianity at its first introduction, when it came, unarmed with any worldly power, to rebuke the passions of the selfish, and dissipate the darkness which men loved. The great spring of action in the hearts of the first promulgators of our religion was the sentiment of ardent affection and reverence with which Jesus Christ inspired them. The love of Christ constrained them. It was for his sake that they accounted it joy and triumph to toil and suffer, and with the kindling idea of him were blended their best hopes and aims. And this it was, by the way, which constituted the wide difference between him and them, and which makes his fortitude so much more wonderful than theirs. He had no human precedent to which he could look, and from which he might draw strength and animation. No one had gone before him by whose memory his human sympathies might be encouraged, and whose

example might cheer him onward. Only the highest source of Inspiration was open to him—the simple thought of God, and to appreciate this so that it might stand in the place of all other supports, an elevation of mind was necessary of which we can but faintly conceive. His successors on the contrary were aided by all those human affections which found an all-animating object in him, and the devoted love which he awakened was their efficient motive to do and endure.

It may be asked whether those, who were active in the first establishment of his religion, were not moved by those great moral principles which he taught. Undoubtedly they were. But then it was these principles, not merely, nor chiefly, as they were presented in words to their understandings, but as they were far more divinely expressed in his character to their hearts. Truth, not abstractly, but as it filled and transfigured his whole being—this it was that kindled in them a noble zeal, “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” What words could convey to them such a sentiment of love as was expressed in his Cross!

Or again it may be intimated that it was the miracles he wrought, that operated so powerfully in convincing and urging onward his followers. It is true his works of power did much; they filled an important and indispensable place in producing that state of feeling in his disciples, requisite to qualify them to carry on what he had begun. But then the main power of his miracles lies not in their mere power, but in their relation to his character, which they help far more strikingly than any thing else to glorify. What a depth of tenderness is laid open, how touching his meekness, what a new lustre is added to all the virtues he exemplified, when we consider them as the virtues of one

endowed with more than regal gifts ; with powers exceeding all that Fortune or Genius has ever bestowed on man ! Look at the case whichever way you will, the result is the same. It was by the force of his character that the apostles were swayed.

And so it has been and must be always. No cause, religious or political, good or bad, has ever gained a foothold in the world, except by the impulse of a leading mind, the energy of some prominent character, some one individual, who has been to its adherents the embodiment of the object at which they have aimed. Individuals of this description have so often and so mournfully abused their influence to selfish purposes, they have been so ready to take advantage of the idolatrous attachment of their fellow-men, that it has failed to be seen how deeply this mode of influence is founded in the nature of man. Thus the maxim has gone forth —“ principles, not men,” a sound maxim, but only in a qualified sense. The truth is, principles at best are but imperfectly set forth in a verbal form. Language is an artificial sign and an inadequate one. It may meet and satisfy the understanding and answer important purposes, but it reaches the great springs of human action only indirectly and by aid of association. The conduct, the life of a human being is the true, natural, divine symbol whereby great truths are made to kindle our strongest affections. So that in the very nature of things, men, living men are required to express in their lives to other men, the great purposes with reference to which they are to be moved.

I make these remarks to show that the stamp of divinity is as visible upon the mode in which Christianity has been communicated to man, as upon its substance. The great truths, the paternal providence of God and another life, have been acknowledged to be

great and important, worthy of God to teach. But the manner in which they have been revealed has not been recognised, as equally worthy of the Deity. 'Why,' it has often been asked, 'why were not these truths written out upon the firmament, so that all men might read without the possibility of mistake, or proclaimed, as by an archangel's trump, so that the whole world might hear?' Alas! there is much written from of old in unfading characters all over the sky, the earth and the sea. There are myriads of voices sounding on from eternity to eternity through all the heights and depths of the universe,—but where is the seeing eye, the hearing ear? Such methods of revelation as above proposed are mere human devices. The mode actually adopted in the Christian dispensation harmonizes perfectly with the deepest principles of human nature, and displays the same wisdom by which that nature was fashioned. Man has been addressed through man. One has been raised up to communicate, the life of truth through his own life, to point men not into space but into their own souls, there to read the will and behold the countenance and discern the spirit of God. In his spiritual features beams the glory of God. The character of Christ is the Rock of Christian faith, the high tower which cannot be hid by the thickest clouds which steam up from the ignorance and corruption of earth, and which assures us that the city of God is there, the dwelling-place of unchanging Truth.

As it was from the character of its Founder that Christianity received its first impulse, so by the same force has it been sustained under the crushing weight of the corruptions by which its brightness has been darkened and its beauty deformed, and from the enormity of these corruptions we may form some idea of

the force by which they have been resisted. This has been its shield amidst the deep wounds which it has received in the house of its friends. The common impression is, that it owes the influence it has retained, amidst the errors of its adherents, to its great moral principles. True. But, to repeat what I have said, these principles in an abstract, verbal form, separated from the life of him by whom they were promulgated, lose nearly all their peculiar power. A moral system of almost equal excellence might be gathered from the records of ancient wisdom. Gibbon has remarked in one of his notes that he finds the great social law of Christian love stated in the plainest terms by a writer who flourished ages before Christ. Take from Christianity the original exposition of truth which it presents in its Founder, suppose it to have been first taught by one whose life gave no significance to his words, and it is evident at once how much it must lose. On the contrary, we might erase from the Christian Records every general precept, yet so long as the acts and sufferings of Jesus were remembered, they would retain an all-commanding influence. The superiority of actions to words has passed into a proverb. But where is it so strikingly shown as in the Religion of Jesus Christ? His precepts recommend themselves to our reason; but the application we allow them is narrow or comprehensive according as we appreciate him. We understand them no further than we understand him. When men, outraged by its corruptions, have been disposed to abjure Christianity altogether, the pure and generous character of its author, dimly discerned indeed, but yet seen in something of its truth, has commanded their respect and prevented them from rejecting a religion promulgated by lips so pure and

eloquent. The greatest sceptics have confessed that the character of Christ is too great and too natural not to be a reality.

When we turn from the past to the present and the future, and inquire by what means the improvement of mankind individually and collectively is to be most effectually promoted, we find in the character of Christ untold resources of wealth and power. "Political reform, pressingly enough wanted, can indeed root out the weeds; but it leaves the ground *empty*, ready either for noble fruits, or new worse tares! And how else is a moral reform to be looked for but in this way, that more and more good men are, by a bountiful Providence, sent hither to disseminate Goodness; literally to sow it, as in seeds shaken abroad by the living tree? For such in all ages and places is the nature of a good man; he is ever a mystic, creative centre of goodness; his influence, if we consider it, is not to be measured; for his works do not die, but being of eternity, are eternal; and in new transformation and ever wider diffusion, endure, living and life-giving." Then let him whose character is acknowledged to be the best and purest ever exhibited on earth—let him live in the faith and imagination of men. To ascertain our destiny—to know the hidden aim of our being, we need not gaze into the sky, or pry fruitlessly into Futurity. The end of life is revealed in Jesus Christ. He is the model whereby all men may fashion themselves. When he appears, not personally but morally, not to the outward eye, but to the inward sense, we shall become like him for we shall see him as he is.

When the character of Christ is felt, then exists that principle of action denominated in the Scriptures, faith,—the faith that saves the soul. Then will the destiny of man be realized. He who contemplates Jesus Christ,

as he is presented in the brief and simple sketches of his life, as a pattern of disinterestedness, self-command, and piety, before whose imagination and affections that wonderful being stands distinctly revealed, such a one must feel the force of the character of Christ. He beholds a being, the greatest that ever trod this earth, not merely for the extraordinary powers he possessed, but for the uniform humility, the touching self-forgetfulness, with which he bore his great gifts ; one who disregarded all the seductions of ambition and power, in whom the hosannas of multitudes never excited one throb of vain glory, whose tenderness, overflowing all artificial distinctions, poured a tide of mercy into the hearts of the degraded and miserable ; one who suffered fatigue and hunger and thirst, and contumely and violence, that he might comfort, correct, and bless our race ; out of whose heart, in the very agonies of death, broke words of affection for his mother, and prayers for those who tortured him. Such was the man of Nazareth. But how vain are words to describe his original excellence ! Could we only bring up before our minds, the spotless and venerable idea of him ; could our cold and sluggish imaginations only picture him in his youth, in the serenity of that blessed countenance, in that attitude of unspeakable love, yearning to gather the whole family of the suffering and afflicted, even as a bird gathereth her young under her wings ;—could the eye of the soul be so cleansed as to see him as he was, then we should not need to be told of the power of his character. In the reverence, gratitude, and love which would overflow our minds, gushing up from a thousand hidden springs, we should have a present proof of his moral force, of his power to sweep away from the heart all the false idols and temples we erect there, and to cover it with the unfading verdure and the immortal

fruits of true and evergrowing goodness. If we have ever been in any degree impressed with the wisdom and excellence of Jesus, by the emotions we have sometimes felt, let us pause and consider what a transformation must be wrought in him, who discerns this illustrious being not partially and by glimpses transient and far between, but who cherishes his pure idea in the innermost recesses of his mind, amidst his best sensibilities, studying all the beautiful details of his life with an ever-present conviction of reality, learning to conform all his ideas of greatness to him as an unerring standard! Must not a mind, thus occupied, be strong in the goodness which it loves? And if strong in goodness, then saved, yes, saved—O, how truly saved! being delivered from all corrupting passions, from all those false prepossessions, to which those who live in the world without a pure object to look at and to love, are ever so exposed,—being redeemed from all iniquity, and inspired with an affection for all that is holy in imagination, upright and benevolent in act.

If a great and good man were now to appear, such as this age, and many preceding ages, had not produced nor approached, a great public benefactor, an example of every private virtue, and it were our privilege to be associated with him daily, intimately, by the respect and love he would inspire, would not every generous and virtuous sentiment be called into action? Would not our cheeks be crimsoned with shame at the bare thought of doing any thing abhorrent to the nature of our revered friend? Could any thing act upon us so powerfully as such a fellowship with living virtue? Of precisely this nature is the force of the character of Christ, and this is the way in which he who believes in Christ attains to that blessedness, which the Scriptures describe as the presence of God, Heaven, Salvation.

To live in a Christian land, among Christian institutions; to profess the Christian faith in one or another form,—this is not faith in Christ, although thousands hug the delusion. It is to have the sacred image of his excellence set up at the very fountain-head of one's spiritual being,—this is faith, living, Christian, saving faith. He who cherishes it will, aye, he must be saved. The decree is writ in the very constitution of the soul.

The world has suffered from nothing so much as from false ideas of greatness. The passion for military glory has been the fruitful cause of slavery, bloodshed, and crime. How little has the experience of its fatal results hitherto done to teach men wisdom! How is this deadly charm ever to be broken, save by the formation of a nobler idea, the creation of a better taste, the erection of the true standard? In Jesus Christ, the real greatness of our nature—the glory of a pacific, all-enduring temper—is revealed. Let him then be lifted up before all eyes, and all hearts will be touched, and the sword and the spear and the banner bathed in blood will be buried at the foot of the cross, and it will be felt that all other courage is fear, all other glory shame, in comparison with that spirit which subdues by mercy and reigns by suffering.

Once more. There is a wide and mournful need of confidence in the omnipotence of moral truth. This it is that the wise in all ages have most seriously wanted. They have had, as it has been said of a certain political party, "more of the wisdom of experience than the wisdom of hope," and they have "looked for their Future—only in the direction of the Past." Look at the wise and the educated and the thinking at the present day. How faint and sickly are their hopes of the moral improvement of our race! Things are deemed impossible, for the instant accomplishment of which

only that simple energy of will is required, which a sure faith in the vitality of moral truth would immediately create. In these circumstances how unspeakably precious, (could it only be brought home to the heart!) the memory of one in whom no trait is more conspicuous than a calm and unfaltering confidence in truth, and this too in a condition of things apparently the darkest and most hopeless! Without a single decisive token of success, he uniformly looked upon the great revolution he commenced, as already consummated. In no respect is his example more original and inspiring. In nothing does he stand so pre-eminently alone, far above all other teachers, as in his perfect faith in human nature. He scattered fearlessly abroad the seeds of truth, and trusted in God that they would germinate and grow. Whereas all other teachers have divided their doctrines into *esoteric* and *exoteric*—philosophy for the initiated, and fables for the vulgar. And at the present day, how frequently is it said in regard to any new and more rational view of religion ‘It is all very true. I understand and believe it. But it will not do to disseminate such views. The generality of men cannot appreciate them.’ I say nothing of the modesty of this sentiment. It reveals the very worst kind of infidelity, and our sabbaths, our churches, and all our multitudinous institutions of Religion are but a dead and delusive show, so long as man believes not in man. Jesus Christ went down directly among the most ignorant and degraded, and well did he describe it as the most decisive attestation to his divine authority, that he delivered the glad messages of Truth “to the Poor.”

But I have done. To bring the man of Nazareth, the elder brother of our race, the chosen son of God,

the Revealer of God and man, more within the reach of human sympathies; to show that such, in the unspeakable grace of God, are the Records of his life, that the remotest generation may cherish, not merely a traditional, but a personal faith in him; that in the very form and structure of the Gospels there are the means by which every man may be brought into personal intimacy with him, beholding him, as it were, face to face, is the ultimate aim of the present work; and gives it whatever value it may be found to possess. How imperfect it is, how all-inadequately I have touched upon the great subject, I feel deeply. Still it has been a delightful employment. If it fail to awaken interest in other minds, I do not say I shall not be disappointed. But I shall be ungrateful to the Giver of all good if I ever cease to acknowledge, with fervent thankfulness, the confirmation it has afforded to my own faith.

THE END.

ERRATA.

PAGE 101, 13th line from the bottom for these read those.

118, 16th " top " acts " arts.

119, 17th " " " nature " mature.

170, 12th " bottom " become read became.

172, 2d " top " discussions read dissensions.

265, 2d line of note for Do you believe? read Do you believe.

GIESELER'S CHURCH HISTORY.

CAREY, LEA & BLANCHARD, *Philadelphia.*

HAVE JUST PUBLISHED,

A TEXT-BOOK

OF

ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY:

By J. C. I. GIESELER,

Doctor of Philosophy and Theology, and Professor of Theology in Gottingen.

TRANSLATED FROM THE THIRD GERMAN EDITION,

By FRANCIS CUNNINGHAM.

In 3 volumes, 8vo.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

FROM PROFESSOR STUART, OF ANDOVER, MASS.

Theological Seminary, Andover, 25th July, 1836.

The undersigned has frequently consulted Gieseler's Church History, as published by the author in German: and he has no hesitation in saying, that on the whole he prefers it, for purposes such as he has had in view, to any other church history within his knowledge. His particular reason for this is, the uncommon diligence, judgment, and accuracy, with which the writer has given the essence of the sources on which he relies for important facts and documents; by virtue of which one is enabled in a good measure to judge for himself what the state of the original testimony is. This is a privilege which must often be abandoned, for the most part, in reading many writers in this department of history, inasmuch as they only give their own judgment and estimation of facts, without enabling the reader to form his.

With some of the *theological* opinions of Gieseler, the writer of this supposes himself to disagree; but these are seldom admitted to be the guide of his historical statements. In general, I think great candour, accuracy, and thorough search, are developed in Gieseler's work, although its studied brevity cuts off detail which now and then would be grateful to the reader.

I fully admit the learning and ability of Neander, as a Church historian; but Gieseler places one in a better condition to judge for himself than Neander does, who gives his sources very meagerly, and seems to expect that you will always take his own views as well-grounded and correct. Gieseler places his reader in a condition in which he is enabled to pursue his investigations to any extent that he pleases. On this account, I use him as my most common manual, when I have occasion to pursue a topic which belongs to his department, and as a *manual* for consultation, I think this work can hardly fail of the patronage of our American community. MOSES STUART.

FROM PROFESSOR EMERSON, OF ANDOVER, MASS.

Judging from such portions as I have read of Gieseler's work, (perhaps one-fourth of the whole,) I am happy to concur in the above commendation. I would just add, that I am particularly pleased with his plan and the divisions of his work, and shall be happy to see it in a good English dress. RALPH EMERSON.

FROM PROFESSOR HODGE, OF PRINCETON, N. J.

Princeton, July 29, 1836.

I have been led to entertain a very high opinion of the merits of Gieseler's Ecclesiastical History, not only from the success of the work in its own country, but from a

knowledge of its plan and from an occasional inspection of its contents. Its distinguishing feature is the copious citation of authorities and the extracts from the early writers given in the notes. It thus opens before the student the very sources of historical knowledge, and presents the events and opinions of former ages in their original form and spirit. I therefore think that Mr. Cunningham has performed a very important service in rendering this work accessible to the Christian public. C. HODGE.

FROM PROFESSOR SEARS, OF NEWTON THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTION.

Newton Theological Institution, August 15, 1836.

I am happy to learn that you have translated Gieseler's Manual of Church History. For the distinguished author, whose acquaintance I had the pleasure of making while in Germany, I entertain sentiments of very high respect; and though differing from some of his theological opinions, I regard his manual as the most perfect *text-book* before the public. Neander's work has another design, Mosheim's can no longer be used, Guericke's is too polemical and unattractive, and Haac's too brief. Gieseler is, to say the least, the second, and in some respects the first Ecclesiastical historian of the age; his critical accuracy is unrivalled, his method clear, his literary notices complete, and his authorities very copious and well chosen.

B. SEARS.

FROM PROFESSOR WARE, OF CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

August 6, 1836.

I am glad to learn that your translation of Gieseler's Church History is to appear soon. A better book than we before had, for the study of Ecclesiastical History, was greatly wanted: and this work, it seems to me, gives fairer promise, than any other with which I am acquainted, to supply that want.

The plan, and the arrangement and distribution of parts, has great advantages; and the extreme brevity of the text is well compensated by constant reference in the notes to the original sources, copious citation of authorities, and an ample and minute supply of dates. The liberal and impartial spirit running through the work is worthy also of all commendation.

HENRY WARE.

The appearance of this work is highly creditable to the American press, and the translator and publishers will alike receive the thanks of the student of Ecclesiastical History for this important addition to his means of knowledge. It professes to be a Text-Book, and so it is; for the text, although it presents a clear and continuous view of the history of the church, is exceedingly compressed; and the main body of the work consists of copious citations in the form of notes, from the original authorities. These full and apposite extracts, instead of bare references, afford a desirable opportunity to the student of judging for himself on the various topics which are presented in the text. They display also the immense research and learning of the writer, who undertakes to be the guide of others in this department of theological education. The arrangement of the work is obvious and natural, and much to be preferred to the old division into centuries.—*The Presbyterian.*

The history of the Christian church is of universal interest, as forming so important a part of the religious history of mankind. To the theologian it is indispensable. It is important to the general student from its intimate connexion with the history of learning, of philosophy, of ethics, and of the arts. Without it no one can gain a thorough knowledge of Ecclesiastical law, or the laws of Christian states.

We hope Gieseler's Text-Book will be adopted as a theme for the classes in our Colleges and Theological Seminaries; and if the youth of the next course are thoroughly drilled according to Gieseler's mental exercises, they will be far more competent to stand to their spiritual arms, and to combat the multiplied corruptions of Christianity which have proceeded from the grand Eastern and Western Anti-Christian associations, than their predecessors.

One of the great difficulties in the study of Ecclesiastical History has been this, to bring the multifarious and discordant materials into order and compactness, so that the prominent points could be clearly discerned, and the cardinal and permanent topics be divested of the rubbish under which they have been concealed. In this aspect particularly Gieseler's Text-Book is invaluable. The student is not embarrassed with records of antiquated temporary heretics whose infatuations died with them, and the memorial of whom is equally perplexing and nugatory. The materials of these volumes are not a compound of redundant and irrelevant trifles, but the annals are of a sterling character, and stimulate to more extensive research.—*American Protestant Vindicator.*

~~APR 11 1984~~

~~JUN 1 1988~~

Stene
Bookbinding Co., Inc.
100 Cambridge St.
Charlestown, MA 02129



